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Editorial

Lon Graham

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The search for a Baptist identity is an ongoing project, and necessarily so. Baptists do not have a founder to whom we may look for guidance or inspiration. To be sure, we have John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, or, for some, the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey church in London, but these do not function in nearly the same way as a John Wesley for the Methodists or a Martin Luther for the Lutherans. Neither do we have a single confession to which all Baptists subscribe, and by which we may judge our own theology and practice. Our Presbyterian and Reformed brothers and sisters have their Westminster Confession and Three Forms of Unity, respectively, which give them a confessional foundation from which they might understand their denominational identities.

Baptists certainly do not have a Magisterium akin to that of the Roman Catholics. There is no hierarchy from which teachings and rulings are handed down. The very thought of such would make some Baptists recoil in horror. We also lack an inherent inclusiveness that other denominations enjoy. That is, Baptists are independent by nature, responsible to Christ alone as Lord, each church a city of its own. This can lead to an independence that excludes cooperation between churches, or, at the very least, limits it significantly.

Because of these things, Baptists always seem in search of an identity. The Particular Baptists of the seventeenth century produced a confession in 1644 explaining who they were, what they believed, and what they practised. This was followed by a significant revision of that confession in 1646, followed by editions in 1651 and 1652 with minor changes. Then, just over thirty years later, they produced another

confession with similar theology but completely different wording. Since that time, Baptists have written dozens of confessions, some meant for denominational use and others meant only for a specific church, each striving in their own time and place to define the beliefs, practices, and identity of the group who authored it.

Perhaps that is not a bad thing, though. With no binding standard of faith, no founder to guide and influence, no Magisterium, it may well be safe to say that part of our Baptist identity is that our identity is never fixed. We are always remaking ourselves, searching Scripture and our history for hints and indicators, but ultimately making the Baptist faith anew in each generation. In that sense, we could say that Baptist identity is an evolving set of negotiated relationships with different principles.

For example, in the latter part of the last century, in the United States, Baptists fought over the issue of biblical authority. Both sides of the debate believed in biblical authority, but they did not agree on the particulars of that belief. Through debate, which was sometimes rancorous, each side negotiated their own relationship with that doctrine.

One may also consider Baptist ecclesiology. If there is any doctrine that marks out Baptists, it is this one. Despite this, Baptists have not agreed as to polity, the meaning of the Lord's Supper, the necessity of baptism, and the form of worship. Each of those is negotiated, and often fought over, by each generation. Some negotiate a stance toward baptism, for example, that leads them to a belief in open communion, while others go through the same process and hold to strict communion. Many Baptists have reflected on the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper and concluded that he is present in some way, while others have reflected and concluded differently, holding that the supper is merely a remembrance on the part of the participant.

The examples could be multiplied. Baptists hold to these various principles, but how we believe them varies, and it is up to each successive generation of Baptists to negotiate that for themselves. The continual search for a Baptist identity, rather than being a bug in the system, is instead a feature of it.

Baptists have a need, impulse, and ability to search out and clarify their identity. The *need* for it is shown above. The *impulse* to do it is seen in our history of confessions, doctrinal statements, and, yes, conferences on Baptist identity.

Perhaps most important is our *ability* to define ourselves under the lordship of Jesus. We are not bound by a founder, and that frees us from the bounds of their theological vision. We do not have a standardised confession, and so we are not restricted in our theology and practice to the uninspired words of people who lived centuries before us. We do not have a Magisterium handing down doctrines and decrees. Baptist theology and practice are from the ground up, not from the top down. The voice of the Lord is heard in the conference of his people.

It was in this spirit that a group gathered online on 23–4 April 2021 for the *Dimensions of Baptist Identity* conference. It was originally planned to be held at the IBTS Centre in Amsterdam, but covid-19 restrictions meant that the conference was forced to go online. While the participants all missed the face-to-face interaction that we would have had in Amsterdam, we enjoyed the benefit of having more people join us than otherwise would have been possible.

The articles resulting from the conference presented in this volume are illustrative of the ongoing search for a Baptist identity in our generation. Curtis Freeman offers a theory of Baptist identity as a narratively formed construct. He offers seven 'c's of Baptist identity, contending that Baptist identity is construed, contested, convictional, characterised, communal, contextual, and complex. He puts his thesis to the test in the stories of Baptists in two very different contexts: Great Britain and North India.

Three articles demonstrate, in different ways, the controversies and difficulties that arise in the negotiation of identity. Over the last century, Baptists have been rethinking past attitudes and beliefs with regard to race and gender. Andy Goodliff focuses on the story of Baptists in the United Kingdom and how facing these issues has changed the life and practice of their Baptist Union. Ivan King also gives his attention to the UK Baptists, though for a quite different reason. He

explores the tension that has come from the Baptist belief in the separation of church from the state on the one hand and the financial dependence of Baptist churches in the United Kingdom on government support. He shows that beliefs must always meet the solid ground of real life, and it is then that one may see how deeply held they are. Crossing the Atlantic, my own article focuses on the Texas Baptists in the United States and the controversy that erupted between the moderates and the inerrantists in the 1980s and 1990s, showing how a unique Texas Baptist identity enabled the moderates to prevent the inerrantists of taking control of their state organisation.

This volume also offers two articles that serve as examples of the current give and take of negotiating identity. In recent years, through the work of people such as Anthony Cross, Stanley Fowler, and Steven Harmon, sacramentalism and sacramental theology have seen a resurgence in Baptist life. Linda Aadne applies a Baptist sacramental view of the church, which is trinitarian and communal, to the practice of discipleship. Aadne contends that the collective practices of the local church are themselves sacramental and these practices ought to be the foundation of Christian discipleship. Roland Spjuth, however, warns against adopting a sacramental approach too quickly and without humbly listening to critiques of sacramentalism. He draws on two disparate sources of criticism: the sixteenth-century Anabaptist Pilgram Marpeck and the twentieth-century liberation theology Leonardo Boff. While not written with the other in mind, the two articles show, in somewhat real time, how this particular issue is being negotiated by Baptists.

As mentioned above, Baptist cooperation has not always been a straightforward practice. Two articles deal with the question of how Baptists are connected. Matt Edminster analyses the inter-congregational partnership networks of the Baptist churches in Estonia. Tarmo Toom's scope is much larger, as he investigates the character and place of the ancient creeds in the life of Baptists, finally contending for their recovery in congregational worship.

Finally, it has been said that the local church is the headquarters of Baptist life. It would be approaching theological malpractice to have

a conference or journal volume dealing with Baptist identity and not have some focus on a particular church. Ian Randall has supplied this with his study of the history of St Andrew's Street Baptist Church, Cambridge, focusing on the pastors who helped shape its course and showing how, through them, the church's identity changed over the years.

The search for a Baptist identity began long before any of us took the stage, and it will continue long after we have all taken our final bow. This volume is not intended to be anything like the final word. Rather, it is offered as an additional word in the broader conversation, and it is hoped that it helps to move the conversation forward in our generation.

Tribute to Anthony R. Cross

Lon Graham

On 22 July 2021, our colleague Anthony R. Cross passed away. His contributions to the academy were numerous. Anthony's work walked the lines between history, theology, and biblical studies. He was as comfortable dealing with issues in New Testament studies as he was covering the history of British Baptists. His work on baptism and sacramentalism is perhaps his most well-known contribution. His *Baptism and the Baptists* was a chief part of a renewed interest among Baptists in baptism specifically and the sacraments more generally. The volumes of *Baptist Sacramentalism*, co-edited with Philip Thompson, remain standard works in the field.

Anthony's academic interests were varied, but a common theme runs through his work, and that is a desire to marshal the findings of the academy for the use of the church at large. This is seen most especially in his more recent work on the ministry, most notably in his book *Useful Learning*. Whether it was his willingness to go against the grain of Baptist life because he was convinced that baptism had a sacramental character or his lengthy footnotes giving minute details regarding the points he made in the main text, Anthony did not write simply to put words on paper. He wrote so that he might contribute to the life of the church.

Sitting at Anthony's kitchen table several years ago, I gained some insight into how he understood his work. He spoke of 'the Conversation'. In the academy and church, no one will ever have the final word. Rather, each person makes their own contribution to a conversation that began before them and will continue long after them. It may be a small contribution, or it may take the conversation in an entirely new direction, but the point of academic work is to make a positive addition to the Conversation.

Anthony's contributions to the Conversation are numerous, varied, and valuable. The academy and church are richer for having heard his voice. Indeed, not having his voice leaves a gap in the conversation that will not easily be filled.

Of course, Anthony was far more than his bibliography, as lengthy as it may be. Indeed, he was not first and foremost an academic. He was first and foremost a husband to Jackie and a father to Laura and Katja. He loved his family with an admirable intensity, and his pride in each one was obvious to anyone who heard him speak of them.

His wit could be biting, though it was never cruel, and even when one was on the receiving end of it, one never felt made fun of. He was self-effacing; although he took his work seriously, he did not take himself too seriously. He was funny, willing to be silly to get a laugh out of someone. His own laugh, when he really got going, was infectious.

I cannot finish this tribute to Anthony without mentioning his generosity. Many things cross my mind when I think of Anthony, but his generosity is very near to the top of the list. After his death, I heard story after story of Anthony's generosity with his time, talents, books, resources, and whatever else he might give to help people who needed it. I knew that he had been generous with me, but I learned that I was not unique. He was that way with everyone.

Thank you, my friend. *Requiescat in pace.*

Framing Baptist Identity

Curtis W. Freeman

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Abstract:
This article frames the question of Baptist identity as a narratively formed construct. It qualifies this description and then tests the qualified identity framework by exploring the stories of the Baptists in Great Britain and North India, asking how we might understand these different versions as part of the same story.

Keywords:
Baptist identity; narrative theology; Baptist Union of Great Britain; Council of Baptist Churches in Northeast India; Council of Baptist Churches in North India; James Wm McClendon, Jr.

Introduction

What does it mean to be a Baptist? The answer could be as simple as 'to be a member of a Baptist congregation' or 'to have been immersed upon the profession of faith in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit' or 'simply the willingness to call oneself a Baptist'.[1] Determining questions of identity, however, are never quite so simple. Identity is more than *what we believe* or *where we belong*. It is a matter of *who we are*. I will propose an approach to answering the question of what it means to be a Baptist by framing the question of Baptist identity as a narratively formed construct.[2] Next, I will offer seven qualifications for this framework. Finally, I will test my qualified framework by exploring the

[1] Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins conclude that the three criteria distinguishing Baptist identity in America are believer baptism, congregational polity, and the willingness to call oneself a Baptist (Thomas S. Kidd, Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 249–52). As I show in this article, even the willingness to name oneself as a Baptist may not be sufficient as a marker of identity when examined from a global perspective.

[2] I am employing a framework to the question of Baptist identity as a 'schema of interpretation' in the sense described by Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York: Harper, 1974), p. 21.

stories of the Baptists in Great Britain and North India, asking how we might understand these different versions as part of the same story.[3]

Telling the Baptist Story

Is it possible to tell the Baptist story in such a way that all Baptists might recognise and claim it as their own? Depending on which demographers you consult, there are in the neighbourhood of fifty to sixty million Baptists worldwide from every race, gender, nationality, and ethnicity.[4] Given the prominence Baptists place on liberty of governance and freedom of conscience, it is not surprising that there is more than a little reticence about producing a grand and totalising narrative for all Baptists. For example, Bill Leonard's comprehensive history signals this humility in his title *Baptist Ways*. He explains,

> The thesis of this book is relatively simple. It suggests that amid certain distinctives, Baptist identity is configured in a variety of ways by groups, subgroups, and individuals who claim the Baptist name. This identity extends across a theological spectrum from Arminian to Calvinist, from conservative to liberal, from open to closed communionist, and from denominationalist to independent.[5]

Though all Baptists share a common history and tradition, there is no consensus around an exclusive and distinct way of being Baptist.

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[3] I wish to express my gratitude to Fred Downs, Paul Fiddes, John Webster, Xi Lian, Laura Levens, and Philip Jenkins for their comments on an earlier draft of this article. I chose to explore the question of Baptist identity in areas of the world where I am very much an outsider and about which my knowledge was very limited. These readers saved me from many mistakes and missteps. Whatever faults remain are of my own making.

[4] The Baptist World Alliance describes itself as 'a fellowship of 241 conventions and unions in 126 countries and territories comprising 47 million baptized believers in 169,000 churches'. See 'Member Unions', *Baptist World Alliance* <https://www.baptistworld.org/member-unions/> [accessed 12 April 2021]. These numbers reflect the BWA records, but there are other Baptist bodies (e.g. the Southern Baptist Convention) not affiliated with the BWA, and these statistics reflect only the baptised members. They do not include children and others who may count themselves as belonging without having yet become fully members of a congregation. Other demographers count the global Baptist numbers differently. For example, one recent study counts the total Baptists worldwide to be 58 205 000. See Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, eds, *Atlas of Global Christianity*, *1910–2010* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 90.

[5] Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2003), p. 11.

These polarities, however, as James Wm McClendon Jr observed, reveal too little about Baptist identity because they merely echo wider theological arguments between Calvinism–Arminianism and modernism–fundamentalism[6] to which we might add charismatic–non-charismatic, complementarianism–egalitarianism, and so forth. McClendon proposed that Baptists might examine their own convictions and practices as a resource for understanding their shared identity. Rather than trying to create a universal account, he pursued a more modest strategy that displayed rival versions of the Baptist story within a larger narrative framework. McClendon's proposal moved along similar lines as Alasdair MacIntyre, who in his seminal essay on moral philosophy *After Virtue* argued that 'I can only answer the question "What am I to do?" if I can answer the prior question "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?"'[7] Playing off McIntyre's line, I might summarise McClendon's argument in this way: I can only answer the question 'What does it mean to be Baptist?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'

MacIntyre contends that this narrative inquiry requires attending to a 'historically extended, socially embodied argument […] about the goods which constitute that tradition'.[8] From a tradition-dependent standpoint one asks, 'What type of enacted narrative would be the embodiment, in actions and transactions of actual social life, of this particular theory?'[9] As a mode of enquiry, tradition is polemical and dialectical. It situates all accounts within a narrative history from a particular tradition-constituted standpoint. Following a narrative approach, McClendon described Baptists (and other free churches or baptistic communities) as a cornucopia of contested versions within a shared narrative tradition accumulated across five hundred years. This story in all its diversity, conflict, and fragmentation, he argued,

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[6] James Wm McClendon, Jr, *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, rev. edn (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012; first published 1986), pp. 24–25.

[7] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 201.

[8] MacIntrye, *After Virtue*, p. 207.

[9] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), p. 80.

constituted an alternative theological vision that serves as a counterpart to the more recognised Catholic and Protestant traditions.[10]

McClendon came to this narrative dependent theological outlook early in his career in his groundbreaking work *Biography as Theology*. There he explained,

> We need to examine very carefully two related implications: the suggestion that some theology may be expressed *via* narrative, and the stronger suggestion that narrative or *story* is a means of expression uniquely suited to theology or at least to Christian theology.[11]

In the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*, McClendon utilised this narrative approach to recover what he called the baptist vision as a distinctive standpoint for Christian theological reflection and to retrieve diverse and divergent baptist voices as partners for theological conversation.[12] He identified biblicism, mission, liberty, discipleship, and community as persistent marks of the shared life in Christ that all baptists have lived out, though often very differently, and he contended that the first mark was a touchstone for the others.[13]

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[10] McClendon offered a broader typology similar to Walter Klaassen, who proposed that groups descending from the radical reformation constitute a third way in *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (Waterloo: Conrad Press, 1973). I am indebted to David Aers for helping me to imagine this way of describing the baptist tradition (Aers, *Versions of Election: From Langland & Aquinas to Calvin & Milton* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), pp. x–xi).

[11] James Wm McClendon, Jr, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), pp. 188.

[12] McClendon referred to this third way as 'baptist', using the lower case 'b' to include such diverse groups as *Täufer* and Baptists to Pietists and Pentecostals. So conceived, the baptist vision is not so much a denominational, historical, or sociological account as much as it is a theological standpoint. He could also speak of the big 'B' 'Baptist' tradition. See Curtis W. Freeman, James Wm McClendon, Jr, and C. Rosalee Velloso da Silva Ewell, *Baptist Roots: A Reader in the Theology of a Christian People* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999). This Baptist theological anthology was an attempt to provide a discrete set of texts that display the range and diversity of this tradition along the lines that Peter Lombard took in curating an Augustinian Catholic tradition in *The Sentences*, 4 vols, trans. by Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2007–2010).

[13] McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 26–31. This account of baptist identity was the subject of his graduation address for the Baptist Theological Seminary at Rüshlikon, Switzerland on 25 April 1985, posthumously published in *Baptistic Theologies*, 6, no. 1 (Spring 2014), 23–35. McClendon participated in a similar summary of Baptist practices that included Bible study, shared discipleship, common life, sacramental signs, and free witness. See 'Re-Envisioning Baptist Identity', in *Baptists Today,* 26 June 1997, pp. 8–10, and *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 24, no. 3 (Fall 1997), 303–10.

McClendon summarised this standpoint in a hermeneutical motto he called 'the baptist vision'. *This is that*: the church is the apostolic community, and the commands of Jesus are addressed to us. *Then is now*: we are the end time people, a new humanity anticipating the consummation of the blessed hope.[14] The five marks McClendon names are not so much a list of principles or doctrines around which to build basic agreement, rather they are more of a set of practices that give rise to the life Baptist communities have attempted to live out in the faith shared by all Christians. McClendon's account suggests that the formation of basic beliefs and convictions is the result of engaging in the active and dynamic practices of studying the Bible, engaging in mission, exercising faith freely, watching over one another, and sharing a common life. This performative/narrative account built around the shared set of practices of the baptist vision allows for diversity and divergence by locating the various versions within a single dynamic tradition.[15] Yet despite the variations and variances of performance, it is possible to observe family resemblances in the practice, and those similarities constitute Baptist identity.[16] Perhaps most importantly, McClendon's account of the Baptist vision is not an attempt to identify the distinctive marks that delineate the ways in which Baptists differ from other Christians, but rather to describe how the Baptist practice of the faith exhibits a distinctive way of being Christian. I want to frame this description by making seven qualifications of a performative/narrative approach to understanding Baptist identity.

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[14] McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 30; and *Doctrine: Systematic Theology, Volume 2*, rev. edn (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), pp. 45–46.

[15] McClendon's account is strikingly similar to the theoretical description of 'everyday practices' offered by Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). According to de Certeau, everyday practices denote 'tactical' activities beneath the social conformity of the wider culture.

[16] I am here appealing to the notion as developed by Ludwig Wittgenstein, who suggested that things, which may appear to be related by an essential common feature, may instead be connected by overlapping similarities (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edn, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1968), §67). I am also drawing from the language theory of J. L. Austin, who pointed to the performative aspect of language, namely, that the perlocutionary force of the words names the actual effect or uptake, intended or not. See John L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Lecture VIII, pp. 94–108; and John R. Searle, *Speech Acts* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 22–26. Both notions from Wittgenstein and Austin were central to McClendon's theological project.

Qualifying the Performative/Narrative Approach

First, *Baptist identity is constructed*. The baptist vision as McClendon describes it is a hermeneutical standpoint. It is a way of seeing. It means that the stories we tell are how we see things. Our social location and place in the world shape and influence the way we frame the stories we tell. It is to be expected, then, that Baptists who inhabit different spaces and spaces differently, though they may engage in the same set of practices, tell the story with a different voice. There is no ideal account of Baptist identity. No one has the privilege of an omniscient point of view from which to look down on the world and describe the essence of what it means to be Baptist. Nor are there firm and certain foundations of self-evident facts that can ensure the story we tell corresponds to the way things really are. The stories we tell about what it means to be Baptist are of our own making.[17]

Second, *Baptist identity is contested*. General and Particular, Regular and Separate, Sabbatarian and Millenarian, Six-Principle and Two-Seeds-in-the-Spirit, Open and Close Communion, Free Will and Hard Shell, Fundamentalist and Modernist, National and Progressive, Evangelical and Ecumenical, Traditional and Contemporary, No-Hellers and Oh-Hellers, Southern and Othern. The list of adjectives used to qualify the Baptist story seems almost endless. The real problem, however, is not the adjective. It is the noun. 'Baptist' is hard to define because it is a contested concept. It recurs in the history of discussion, but the meaning is subject to chronic dispute. The significance of the word 'Baptist' constitutes and is constituted by its use.[18] Baptist identity

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[17] James Wm McClendon, Jr, and James M. Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism*, rev. edn (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1994), pp. 7–10. McClendon's theological outlook was non-foundational, as Nancey Murphy noted, 'We at least have the example of James William McClendon to guide our way, for it was the baptist McClendon, stripped of Constantinian pretensions, but clothed with the courage and wisdom of the Gospel, who has led us into this wonderful new land of theology without foundations.' (Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation, eds, *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), p. 31) McClendon and Murphy mapped the distinguishing criteria of modern vs. postmodern theologies in 'Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies', *Modern Theology*, 5, no. 3 (April 1989), 191–214.

[18] W. B. Gallie, 'Essentially Contested Concept', in *The Importance of Language*, ed. by Max Black (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), pp. 121–46; and Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 389.

is defined in and by the contestation. It is never fixed, and it is always evolving. There is no essential way to identify what it means to be a real Baptist. All accounts are contested.

Third, *Baptist identity is convictional*. This practical and narrative account of Baptist identity is rooted in an understanding of convictions, which McClendon defined as persistent beliefs that will not, and indeed cannot, be relinquished without becoming a significantly different person or community.[19] Convictions are not just beliefs or opinions. They are core beliefs that define identity. To put it simply, we are our convictions, and our convictions inform the way we practise the faith. It is remarkable that the diversity of Baptist groups seems to share a basic set of convictions that include simple biblicism, believer baptism, regenerate membership, gathered church, shared discipleship, believer priesthood, congregational polity, evangelical mission, and religious liberty. Yet, as Paul Fiddes has noted, there seems to be 'something distinctive about the way that Baptists have *held these convictions together*' so that 'the combination or constellation is more distinctive than the single items'.[20] Not all Baptists hold these convictions in an identical way or accord them the same weight. Some convictions are more salient for certain groups than for others, but there is an amazing overlap and crisscross that suggests all Baptists share a basic set of beliefs. The result is that the shared identity of Baptists is 'more about identification than about being identical'.[21]

Fourth, *Baptist identity is characterised*. Telling the Baptist story is not simply rehearsing seminal events, significant dates, demographic data, or basic beliefs. It is about telling a story of characters who embody exemplary qualities. It is about showing what the story means, not in abstract terms, but in concrete lives. What this means is that Baptist identity can be grasped only by observing the lives of the saints. Baptist identity is not universal. It is particular, and only by presenting the biographies of people who display it in exemplary ways are we able to

[19] McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, p. 7; McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 23; and McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 29.
[20] Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 2003), p. 12.
[21] Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, p. 16.

gain insight into the larger narrative that connects what might seem to be discrete and disconnected data. These stories need not be about the famous or the infamous. Indeed, the stories we tell may seem quite ordinary, but telling these personal life stories sheds light on a wider shared story. Understanding Baptist identity, then, is as much hagiography as historiography. Here again McClendon is instructive. His *Biography as Theology* explores the life stories of saints by showing how they display the 'dominant images' of a larger story. That identity gets conveyed not through propositions, but in the lived experience of its practitioners.[22]

Fifth, *Baptist identity is communal*. Identity is something that belongs to a group, and identification is about belonging in a group. It is somewhat misleading, then, to say, 'I identify as a Baptist'. Such a statement may suggest personal commitment and investment, but identification is more than affinity. It is about a sense of shared-ness. To claim an identity is for an 'I' to find a home in a 'We'. Identity is more a symphony than a solo. It is corporate, never simply individual.[23] Baptist identity is about belonging in and to a community of the living and the dead, by engaging with one another in ongoing practices and invoking the memory of a shared tradition. Identity is not simply claiming a set of personal beliefs and commitments. Identity emerges within the social matrix of a common language about the convictions and practices of the community (or communities) in which we participate. McClendon criticises previous accounts that frame Baptist identity 'in terms of the rugged American individualism', which does not 'do justice to the shared discipleship baptist life requires'.[24] Telling the

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[22] McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, p. 110.

[23] Notions of collective identity have two foci of identification with shared features and recognition of shared opportunities and constraints. For a helpful summary of theoretical accounts of collective identity, see Timothy J. Owens, Dawn T. Robinson, and Lynn Smith-Lovin, 'Three Faces of Identity', *Annual Review of Sociology* (2010), 489–90.

[24] McClendon, *Ethics*, rev. edn, p. 29. McClendon's critique reflects a longstanding contestation about individualism in the Baptist story. See my articles 'Can Baptist Theology Be Revisioned?' *Perspectives in Religious Studies,* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1997), 273–310; and 'E. Y. Mullins and the Siren Songs of Modernity', *Review and Expositor,* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1999), 23–42, and a revised and expanded version in *Through a Glass Darkly: Contested Notions of Baptist Identity*, ed. by Keith Harper (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), pp. 84–111. One of the more influential accounts of Baptist identity in recent memory is Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four*

Baptist story is a matter of attending to a narrative that is bigger than 'me and my experience'. It is about telling the story of the people called Baptists with whom we belong.

Sixth, *Baptist identity is contextual*. There can be no generic or abstract account of Baptist identity, nor is there a view from no place in particular. All versions are local. Just as Baptist identity must attend to the convictions and practices of the people, it must also reflect the complex, interconnected ecosystem of the place where people live out their faith. The importance of contextuality was a lesson McClendon learned from Robert Schreiter's influential book *Constructing Local Theologies*.[25] It is a commitment that lived on among his students, especially those associated with the International Baptist Theological Seminary.[26] This contextual qualification means that all accounts of Baptist identity, either explicitly or implicitly, have adjectives. Though Baptists have a widely shared set of convictions and practices, they hold them in distinctive ways that vary from place to place. It may be as simple as whether the congregational potluck meal is comprised of sweet tea and fried chicken, fufu and goat soup, or khar and pitha. But the truth is that there may be significant differences among various racial, ethnic, and sub-denominational groups even in the same geographical region. What this means is that accounts of Baptist identity, to borrow a line from Alexander Pope, must 'consult the genius of the place'.[27]

Fragile Freedoms (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1993). A group of Baptist theologians, who thought that Shurden's account gave too much emphasis to individual freedom, offered an alternative version: Mikael Broadway, Curtis Freeman, Barry Harvey, James Wm. McClendon, Elizabeth Newman, Philip Thompson, 'Re-Envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America', *Baptists Today*, 26 June 1997, <https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/faculty-freeman/reenvisioning-baptist-identity.pdf> [accessed 24 March 2021] (pp. 8–10).

[25] Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985).

[26] Parush R. Parushev, 'Towards a "Baptistic" Contextual Theology', in *Towards an Understanding of European Baptist Identity: Listening to the Churches in Armenia, Bulgaria, Central Asia, Moldova, North Caucasus, Omsk and Poland*, ed. by Rollin G. Grams and Parush R. Parushev (Prague: IBTS, 2006), pp. 36–55. The seminary, in 2014, became the International Baptist Theological Study Centre based in Amsterdam.

[27] Alexander Pope, 'Epistle IV, To Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington', line 57, in *The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope*, ed. by Robert Carruthers, 4 vols (London: Nathaniel Cook), 4, 85.

Seventh, *Baptist identity is complex*. No one is ever just a Baptist. Everyone has multiple identities, named and unnamed. I may be a Baptist, but to be more precise I am a white and cisgender male, husband and father, theologian and teacher, biker and gardener, US citizen and expatriated Texan, cooperative and ecumenical Baptist. These identities intersect with one another and shape who I am and how I inhabit the world. The complex nature of identity makes it a complicated notion. According to one major identity theory, the multifaceted nature of the self is comprised of multiple identities hierarchically arranged in a framework of organisation according to their salience. The more salient an identity, the higher the probability of invoking that identity as the source of an action.[28] These sometimes complementary but often competing commitments constitute who we are, and this complex constellation of interweaving identities begs to be ordered toward a goal — toward a coherent sense of the self.[29] We can only hope that the power of the stories we tell might inform our moral vision in a way that might guide our action toward a *telos* that might bring the world closer to the beloved community that Jesus envisioned.[30]

Recognising Baptist Identity

I want to test out this performative/narrative framework for displaying Baptist identity by placing two groups of Baptists in conversation with each other: The Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) and The Council of Baptist Churches in Northeast India (CBCNEI). Although both the BUGB and the CBCNEI are member bodies of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), the ways they perform their Baptist identity are very different from each other. The BUGB, which was formed in 1813,

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[28] Sheldon Stryker and Richard T. Serpe, 'Commitment, Identity Salience, and Role Behavior: Theory and Research Example', in *Personality, Roles, and Social Behavior*, ed. by William Ickes and Eric S. Knowles (New York: Springer, 1982), pp. 199–218; and Stryker and Peter J. Burke, 'The Past, Present, and Future of an Identity Theory', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63, no. 4 (2000), 284–97.

[29] Ryan Andrew Newson, *Inhabiting the World: Identity, Politics, and Theology in Radical Baptist Perspective* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2018), pp. 51–75.

[30] My colleague Stanley Hauerwas has a way of putting this: 'You can only act in the world you can see, and you can only come to see what you can say' (Stanley Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), pp. 26–29).

is the historic successor of the earliest Baptists that emerged in England in the seventeenth century out of the Protestant Separatist movement.[31] The formation of the CBCNEI in 1950 united into one body a highly diverse group of Christians missionised by American Baptist Churches USA in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[32]

British Baptist identity was born alongside other groups of protestant dissenters in the crucible of non-conformity to the established Church of England.[33] British Baptists subsequently re-identified themselves as part of a religiously inclusive and socially powerful evangelical movement of Methodists, Independents, and Low Church Anglicans.[34] Since 1873, the Declaration of Principle has served as a consensus statement for the BUGB. The Declaration roots Baptist identity in the absolute authority of Jesus Christ, baptism in the triune name of God, and commitment to God's mission in the world.[35] However, by the mid-twentieth century this broad statement no longer seemed to be a sufficiently robust statement of Baptist identity. By the 1980s, two streams of thought about a renewal emerged in the union. These two modes of renewal gained strength in the 1990s.[36]

The first mode emphasised renewal of the denomination by construing the relationship between member churches as a 'strategic alliance'. The second vision of renewal stressed the recovery of the historic Baptist ecclesial understanding of the connection in the union

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[31] Peter Shepherd, *The Making of a Modern Denomination: John Howard Shakespeare and the English Baptists, 1898–1924* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 2001).

[32] F. S. Downs, *The Mighty Works of God: A Brief History of the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India, The Mission Period 1836–1950* (Panbazar, Assam: Christian Literature Centre, 1971), pp. 184–224; and Milton S. Sangma, *History of American Baptist Mission in North-east India, 1836-1950*, 2 vols ([n.p.]: Mittal Publications 1987). The CBCNEI comprises the Assam Baptist Convention, Arunachal Baptist Church Council, Garo Baptist Convention, Karbi Anglong Baptist Convention, Manipur Baptist Convention, and Nagaland Baptist Church Council.

[33] Curtis W. Freeman, *Undomesticated Dissent: Democracy and the Public Virtue of Religious Nonconformity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), pp. 1–37.

[34] David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History From the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), pp. 20–34.

[35] 'Declaration of Principle', *The Baptist Union of Great Britain:* <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=216696> [accessed 7 April 2021].

[36] Andy Goodliff, *Renewing a Modern Denomination: A Study of Baptist Institutional Life in the 1990s* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021), p. 1. My summary of the conversations about renewal of Baptist identity in the BUGB are drawn from Goodliff's account.

as a 'covenant' between churches.[37] The upshot of the decade long attention to renewal was that the BUGB reclaimed the language of both strategic alliance and covenant. Although, as Andy Goodliff observes, 'the goal to develop a distinctive Baptist identity was not reached in any coherent and shared way'.[38] Goodliff notes that the concept of covenant offered a possible theological account of the interdependent 'ties that bind' in the union but instead the union chose to organise around a vague and pragmatic notion of mission. The result is that the BUGB moved in different and competing directions: one that pursued mission in affinity with other evangelical Christian groups and another that followed an ecclesial vision toward an ecumenical connection with the whole church.[39]

These observations about competing visions of renewal for the BUGB might be taken simply as confirmation of Bill Leonard's thesis that 'Baptist identity is configured in a variety of ways by groups, subgroups, and individuals who claim the Baptist name'.[40] However, when placed in a performative/narrative framework, as Goodliff does remarkably well in his account, the contested nature of Baptist identity in the BUGB makes sense. Despite the variations and variances, advocates of the strategic alliance and covenantal versions recognise the family resemblances in their divergent performance and practice. Their argument about Baptist identity extended over time is part of a common narrative tradition. To put it simply, notwithstanding their differences and disagreements they identify one another as members of the Baptist family. Let me move to my second and more challenging case, the question of Baptist identity in North India.

In his history of the CBCNEI, Frederick Downs suggests that the sense of common identity among the Baptists of Northeast India was grounded in their common relationship to the American Baptist

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[37] Goodliff, *Renewing a Modern Denomination*, p. 125. I am indebted to Paul Fiddes for clarifying this distinction between the two trends or movements as 'covenant or strategic alliance', not 'theology or denomination-building' (Fiddes' response to Goodliff's book for a book launch at Regent's Park College Oxford, co-sponsored by the Centre for Baptist Studies and the Baptist Historical Society, 26 February 2021).

[38] Goodliff, *Renewing a Modern Denomination*, p. 132.

[39] Goodliff, *Renewing a Modern Denomination*, pp. 195–98.

[40] Leonard, *Baptist Ways*, p. 11.

Mission.[41] Downs notes that although Baptist identity is very important to members of the CBCNEI, it does not seem to derive from distinctive baptistic matters of faith and order. Unlike Baptists in the United States and Europe, when asked to give an account of Baptist identity, Northeast Indians do not point to distinctive Baptist practices such as believer baptism, congregational polity, religious liberty, or the separation of church and state.[42] He explains that Baptist distinctives seem less important than the ecumenical-evangelical consensus shared more widely among Christians of Northeast India.

Downs proposes that Baptist identity in Northeast India is related more to tribal connection than denominational association.[43] This conclusion draws from his more general theorisation about the relation of Christianity with tribal identity in Northeast India. The Downs thesis asserts that 'the tribes found in Christianity a means of preserving their identity in the midst of change'.[44] Downs explains that the imposition and extension of British rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had a disintegrating effect on the clan, family, and village structure of the people of Northeast India, which previously had provided a sense of identity. He argues that the introduction of Christianity strengthened tribal solidarity and tribal identities, which prior to British colonialisation were weak. Christian missionaries fostered this new sense of identity by creating a standard language, establishing a network of schools, offering an appealing belief system, and providing an ecclesial association, resulting in an integrative socio-cultural effect. Downs proposes that because tribal solidarity is the most salient identity for Christians in Northeast India it provides an integrative principle for historiography in understanding their religious

[41] Downs, *The Mighty Works of God*, p. 185.

[42] Frederick Downs, 'Baptist and Tribal Identity in North East India', *American Baptist Quarterly*, 21, no. 1 (March 2001), 60–61.

[43] Downs, 'Baptist and Tribal Identity in North East India', p. 63.

[44] Frederick Downs, *Christianity in North East India: Historical Perspectives* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1983), p. viii. Downs first explored 'identity' as an integrative principle in the midst the forces of detribalisation in Northeast India, in 'Administrators, Missionaries and a World Turned Upside Down: Christianity as a Tribal Response to Change in North East India', *Essays on Christianity in North-East India*, ed. by Milton S. Sangma and David R. Syiemlieh, NEHU History Series No. 4 (New Delhi: Indus Publication Co. 1994), pp. 169–83 (p. 174).

life.[45] He suggests that Baptist identity in Northeast India is not a matter of conformity to the faith and practice of earlier generations of Baptists in Europe or America, but is more missional and contextual than confessional.[46]

Downs points to the Baptist Church of Mizoram as an example of his thesis. Though not a member of the CBCNEI, Mizoram is contiguous to the states that are, and the Mizo are ethnically related to people in those states. For much of their history, Mizo in the North and Mizo in the South used the same hymnals and educational literature, organised their churches in the same pattern, and freely exchanged members between their churches without stickling over modes of baptism. Mizo did not even use the names 'Presbyterian' and 'Baptist' to identify themselves.[47] Denominational boundaries in Mizoram were determined by mission comity agreements not by congregational deliberation. Because the missionaries in the North were Presbyterian, the Mizo in the North were Presbyterian, and because the missionaries in the South were Baptist, the Mizo in the South were Baptist. Downs contends that their shared tribal identity as Mizo with its common language is their most salient identity and serves as an integrative principle for understanding their faith and practice.

There is much to commend this account, but it is not beyond critique. Downs tells the story of Baptists in Northeast India by drawing from both mission and non-mission indigenous Christian sources.[48] Yet his narrative still represents a perspective of an American Baptist historian and missiologist. It raises the question of how the story might differ if subaltern voices tell it in their own words.[49] The *American Baptist*

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[45] Frederick Downs, 'Identity: The Integrative Principle', *Bangalore Theological Forum*, 24, nos. 1–2 (March–June 1992), 1–14. This essay was subsequently published in *Essays on Christianity in North-East India*, ed. by Sangma and Syiemlieh, pp. 22–36. Downs offers his tribal-identity historiography as an integrative principle in contrast to the Marxist economic-class and postcolonial imperialist-political theories.

[46] Downs, 'Baptist and Tribal Identity in North East India', p. 70.

[47] Downs, 'Baptist and Tribal Identity in North East India', p. 61.

[48] Downs, 'Identity: The Integrative Principle', pp. 4–5.

[49] Since the 1970s, the Church History Association of India has shifted its historiographical methodology to focus on the subaltern perspective, which attends to the life and experiences of local Indians. George Oommen, 'Historiography of Indian Christianity and Challenges of Subaltern Methodology', *Journal of Dharma,* 28, no. 2 (April–June 2003), 212–31. One of the most

Quarterly recently published an issue on 'Baptists in Independent India', in which Telegu, Mizo, and Naga scholars offered their versions of what a self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating Baptist life in postcolonial India looks like.[50] What emerges is a complex and granular set of narratives resulting in a more complicated and contextual account of Baptist identity.

Naga church historian Kaholi Zhimoni describes how for seven decades the Baptist churches of Nagaland have participated in the insurgency movement against the government of India in New Delhi, which they view as an alien power. Their resistance is no small matter given that by the year 2000 Nagaland had become 90 percent Christian — the largest denomination by far being Baptist. As historian Philip Jenkins recently opined, Nagaland is 'more Baptist than Mississippi'.[51] Zhimoni tells a very similar story to Downs, describing the mass conversion to Christianity after independence, and characterising Naga Baptists as broadly evangelical. The story she tells, however, is not simply one of an identity rooted in evangelisation. It also narrates the unfolding struggle for liberty and the witness to peace.[52] Her account of Naga Baptists bears a striking resonance with seventeenth-century English Baptist dissenters, who resisted subjugation to 'the powers that be' (Rom 13:1, KJV). Could it be that the subversive spirit among Naga Baptists arose from a historic baptistic way of reading the Bible — a

influential and controversial articles from the perspective of postcolonial subaltern theory is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.

[50] *American Baptist Quarterly*, 38, no. 2 (Summer 2019). The Three Self formula is attributed to Henry Venn, the General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society from 1841 to 1873. See Henry Venn and Max Warren, *To Apply the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Henry Venn* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).

[51] Philip Jenkins, 'More Baptist Than Mississippi', *Christian Century*, 10 March 2021, pp. 44–45. For recent history of Christianity in Nagaland see John Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation: Religion and the Formation of Naga Political Identity* (Milton Park and New York: Routledge, 2016). Thomas offers a postcolonial account of the shaping of Naga political identity that resulted from the reception of Christianity.

[52] Kaholi Zhimoni, 'Seven Decades of the Naga People's Resistance under the Indian Democratic Union and the Peace Attempts by the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC)', *American Baptist Quarterly*, 38, no. 2 (Summer 2019), pp. 161–87 (p. 180).

hermeneutical vision that fosters an apocalyptic imagination and strengthens the conviction to resist the forces of domestication?[53]

Vanlalpeka, a Mizo church historian, provides an account of Baptist identity in Mizoram, which he displays in terms of difference, specifically, the 'sibling rivalry' between Presbyterians and Baptists. From the outset of the Christian mission in the nineteenth century, though the South was Baptist and the North was Presbyterian, the two groups essentially functioned as one church. The insurgency movement against the Indian National Government that began in 1966 complicated this functional union as Mizo from the South were forced to seek refuge in northern towns and villages. When displaced Baptists from the South settled in the North, they united with Presbyterian congregations.[54] The two denominations shared an evangelical and ecumenical theology, and they participated in a common tribal culture. They also used the same hymnal and translation of the Bible; they studied the same Sunday School literature and followed the same form of worship. Yet southern Mizo in northern congregations were unable to receive believer baptism by immersion according to their practice. Compelled by conviction, they made long journeys to Baptist communities in the South in order to observe believer baptism. By the mid-1980s, the denominational distinction grew more pronounced as Baptists gathered congregations in the North, and Presbyterians formed congregations in the South.[55]

Vanlalpeka struggles to name the difference between Baptists and Presbyterians.[56] Their shared history, the sense of a common church life, and their tribal solidarity were salient identity markers. Yet the struggle around baptism that arose during the period of political insurgency indicated there was a distinction in the way they practised the faith. The approach of the Gospel Centenary commemorating the

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[53] Freeman, *Undomesticated Dissent*, pp. 1–37. My argument in the book is that the reception history of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Jerusalem* demonstrates that receptive readers embraced the hermeneutical imagination of dissent and carried on the tradition of undomesticated dissent.

[54] Vanlalpeka, 'Who is the Greatest? An Appraisal of the Narratives of Denominational Origins in Mizoram', *American Baptist Quarterly,* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2019), pp. 188–201 (p. 193).

[55] Vanlalpeka, 'Who is the Greatest?', p. 194.

[56] Vanlalpeka, 'Who is the Greatest?', p. 190.

one-hundred-year anniversary of the arrival of Christianity to Mizoram provided an occasion to tell the story of their unity and diversity. Vanlalpeka highlights the 'Baptist ways' and traditions that are distinctively Mizo by telling the story of their missionary origins, which is intertwined with but also distinct from Presbyterians.[57] He notes that Mizo Christianity is more inclined to orthopraxy than orthodoxy.[58] He concurs with Downs that members of the Baptist Church of Mizoram do not articulate their identity in terms of faith and order distinctives. However, he does not yield to the Downs thesis that reduces Baptist identity to tribal connection.

The confusion is understandable because in so many ways the churches and lifestyles of Mizo Baptists and Presbyterians look very much alike, but as Vanlalpeka suggests, the distinction lies in the common narrative that has shaped the way they understand their place in the world. Mizo Baptists stand within a tradition shared with Mizo Presbyterians. Their interconnected stories are a 'historically extended, socially embodied argument […] about the goods which constitute that tradition'.[59] That tradition is constituted as much by *who* handed it on as by *what* was handed on. It makes sense, then, for Mizo Baptists to think of their identity as bound up with the stories that make up their shared life. That narrative tradition goes back to the first English Baptist missionaries J. H. Lorrain and F. W. Savidge, who arrived in Mizoram on 11 January 1894, as well as to the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist missionary William Williams, who began his work in 1891.[60] The extent to which Mizo Baptists claim a baptistic identity is because they are the social embodiment of the faith that has been handed on to them. As Vanlalpeka notes, the challenge going forward lies with Mizo Baptists who must learn to tell their story in their own voices, from the

[57] Vanlalpeka, 'Who is the Greatest?', p. 188.
[58] Vanlalpeka, 'Who is the Greatest?', p. 192.
[59] MacIntrye, *After Virtue*, p. 207.
[60] Vanlalpeka, 'Who is the Greatest?', p. 197. Rowan Williams argued for a similar kind of Christian identity in the earliest communities among the connection of Pauline, Petrine, and Johannine churches, that is, 'networks of churches with epistolary links running through an apostolic coordinator' (Rowan Williams, 'Does it Make Sense to Speak of pre-Nicene Orthodoxy?', in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. by Rowan Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 1–23 (p. 11).

standpoint of those who received the faith, not just of those who passed it on.[61]

As historian and missiologist John Webster observes in his assessment of Christian and denominational identity in Mizoram,

> Identity is negotiated all the time in varying contexts between us and relevant others who may not see us as we see ourselves. Consequently, identity is never fixed, but is constantly being redefined during the process of living and interacting with others. In addition and as a result, identity is a relational concept: identity is defined in relation to something or someone else.[62]

The stories of Baptists and Presbyterians in Mizoram overlap at many points, and their shared evangelical-ecumenical past is part of their identity. Yet it also makes sense for Mizo Baptists to understand their identity as Baptists, not by trying to point to distinctive beliefs and practices that distinguish themselves from the Presbyterians, but by seeking to understand the story or stories of which they find themselves a part.[63] The story that has surely shaped their identity in salient ways extends back to the Baptist missionaries. It is also the case that by tracing their sense of identity to these English Baptist missionaries, Mizo Baptists can only know who they are by exploring how their story is bound to the stories of the Baptist Missionary Society of Great Britain and to the stories of the wider fellowship of British Baptists that includes the BUGB.

One final example helps to illustrate this narratively shaped framing of Baptist identity. The Council of Baptist Churches in Northern India (CBCNI) was constituted in 1958.[64] It united the four

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[61] Downs argues that as historians tell the story of Christianity in India they must draw from both mission and non-mission indigenous Christian sources, 'Identity: The Integrative Principle', pp. 4–5.

[62] John C. B. Webster, 'History, Identity, and missiology: A Case Study Concerning Mizoram', *Witnessing to Christ in North-East India*, ed. by Marina Ngursangzeli and Michael Biehl, Volume 31, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series <https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/re2010series/35> [accessed 7 April 2021] (page 416).

[63] Borrowing the phrase from MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 201.

[64] In his history of the CNI, Baptist minister and CNI bishop Dhirendra Kumar Sahu narratively frames his account of ecumenical ecclesiology, stating that 'to exist as a church means to have a collective memory and story bears the corporate memory'. See Dhirendra Kumar Sahu, *The Church of North India: A Historical and Systematic Theological Enquiry into an Ecumenical Ecclesiology*

provincial unions that traced their origins to the English Baptist Missionary Society: The Bengal Baptist Union, The Baptist Union of North India, The Utkal Christian Church Central Council, and The Baptist Church of Mizo District.[65] Half of the churches in the CBCNI participated in the formation of the Church of North India (CNI) in 1970. Unlike other churches that formed the CNI, which joined as denominational or regional bodies, Baptists united with the CBCNI on a congregational basis. Other CNI churches recognised Baptist ordinations, and former Baptist ministers were eligible to serve as CNI bishops.[66] The Baptists declared their participation in the CNI to be an 'exercise of the liberty that they have always claimed […] to interpret and administer the laws of Christ'.[67] Rather than denying their Baptist identity by entering into this ecumenical church body, they understood their participation to be consistent with the congregational dimension of Baptist polity that grants liberty to each local church to discern the implications of the Lordship of Christ.[68]

The practice of baptism presented a peculiar ecumenical challenge for Baptists within the CNI, which regards infant and believer's baptism as 'equivalent alternatives'. This policy did not initially address the potential dilemma posed if a person baptised in infancy should desire to receive baptism as a believer. To approve of rebaptism would seem to render the earlier baptism invalid, and to deny the request would appear to be a violation of the freedom of conscience. The problem was ultimately resolved by accommodating to the Baptist practice by discouraging but allowing for the exceptional possibility of rebaptism, even at the risk of anomaly. The new policy recognised that the liturgical event of baptism was not a completed act but part of the

(Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994), p. 227; for the full account of the narrative identity of the CNI, see pp. 227–51.

65 Sahu, *The Church of North India*, p. 127. The Baptist Church of Mizo District subsequently withdrew from the CBCNI to seek unity with the CBCNEI.

66 Sahu, *The Church of North India*, pp. 167–76.

67 Baptist Declaration of Principle, in *The Constitution of the Church of North India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2001), p. 15.

68 Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 225–226. Sahu notes that 'the Baptist churches in India had their local autonomy much modified to the central authority' (*The Church of North India*, p. 168).

process of Christian initiation.[69] It is a reminder that local adaptation of Baptist identity in a new social context may not look the same as in other settings, though the basis for the innovation may be thoroughly baptistic.

Conclusion

By examining the British and North Indian Baptists, I have shown that Baptist identity is not a matter of adhering to a set of unchanging principles or historic beliefs without bearing on social context. Nor is it reducible to an array of social and cultural factors that results in a pluralistic diversity of accounts without a clear sense of unity about what Baptists share in common. Baptist identity as I have argued is a complex constellation of convictions and practices that create a socially constructed and essentially contested embodiment of exemplary characterisations in communal relationships and cultural contexts. The good news is that this framing indicates that a diversity of versions of Baptist identity can find a place within a shared story. The differences are to be expected given the variety of performance. More specifically, it suggests that in order to give our own stories a proper telling we must give other stories a proper hearing. Attending closely to the narrative framework can enable us to detect in each version of Baptist identity an account that is both attendant to the convictions and practices of particular communities as well as resonant with the wider baptistic heritage. As I have already noted, the shared identity of Baptists is 'more

[69] Sahu, *The Church of North India*, pp. 161–65. This language of infant and believer baptism as alternative patterns of participation in a common process of Christian initiation has been used effectively in Baptist ecumenical bilateral dialogues. See *Conversations Around the World 2000–2005: The Report of the International Conversations between the Anglican Communion and the Baptist World Alliance* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2005) <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/101713/conversations_around_the_world.pdf > [accessed 20 April 2021] (pp. 42–45); *The Word of God in the Life of the Church: A Report of International Conversations between the Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance 2006-2010* (Falls Church, VA: BWA 2013), §101, also available in *American Baptist Quarterly*, 31, no. 1 (2012), 28–122 (p.69); and *Faith Working Through Love: Report of the International Dialogue Between the Baptist World Alliance and the World Methodist Council* (2014–2018), <https://o7e.4a3.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Final-Report-of-the-International-Dialogue-between-BWA-and-WMC.pdf> [accessed 20 April 2021] (§§ 70–80).

about identification than about being identical'.[70] Let us then seek to recognise the family resemblances in our diverse performance and practice.

[70] Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, p. 16.

A Summons To Be Heard: Towards a More Just Baptist Identity

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Abstract:
This brief article[1] traces some of the story of English Baptists with regards to gender and race in the last forty years and how the summons to be heard by women and people of colour has brought change to the Baptist Union of Great Britain and to Baptist life more widely.

Key Words:
Women in ministry; racial justice; Baptist Union of Great Britain

Introduction

Through the 1980s and 1990s, Baptists in England were changing. This was in part because England as a society was changing,[2] but it was also about the impact of big movements — charismatic, evangelical, ecumenical — that were transforming the sense of being Christian and being church.[3] At another level, it was also about those with less power asking to be heard.[4] In 1987, the first woman minister, Margaret

[1] I am grateful to Ashley Lovett and Julian Gotobed for their comments in the preparation of this article.
[2] See *20th Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change*, ed. by Francesca Carneval and Julie-Marie Strange (London: Taylor & Francis, 2014).
[3] On the charismatic movement from a Baptist perspective see Douglas McBain, *Fire Over the Waters* (London: DLT, 1997); on evangelicalism, see Rob Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), and on ecumenism see Keith Jones, 'Twentieth Century Baptists: An Ecumenical Highpoint?', *Baptist Quarterly*, 52, no. 1 (January 2021), 21–33.
[4] I acknowledge here my own relative power, as a white male, which gives me a position of privilege not afforded to women or people of colour, about whom I am writing in this paper.

Jarman,[5] was appointed president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB)[6] and in 1997, the first non-white minister, Fred George, was appointed president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.[7] Both of these appointments were influential in helping women and people of colour begin to feel a part of a more equal and just Baptist Union, or perhaps, begin to hope that there might be a more equal and just Baptist Union emerging. They were important because they gave Baptists a platform to talk more widely about gender and race. In the 1980s and 1990s, both women and people of colour were still a very small minority in the structures of the Baptist Union. While the story of women among Baptists has been given some attention,[8] the story of Black and Asian Baptists remains almost entirely untold.[9]

The Summons of Gender

[5] For an account of Jarman's life see the obituary in the *Baptist Times* written by Keith Jones, April 2018 <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/519442/The_Revd_Sister.aspx> [accessed 17 March 2022].

[6] Margaret Jarman was not the first woman president; Nell Alexander in 1978 had been the first woman appointed president, but she was not a minister.

[7] All further references to the Baptist Union are a shorthand for the Baptist Union of Great Britain, which covers mainly England and South Wales.

[8] See for example, John Briggs, 'She-Preachers, Widows and Other Women: The Feminine Dimension in Baptist Life since 1600', *Baptist Quarterly*, 31, no. 7 (July 1986), 337–352; Ruth Gouldbourne, *Reinventing the Wheel: Women and Ministry in English Baptist Life* (Oxford: Whitley, 1997); Faith Bowers, 'Liberating Women for Ministry', *Baptist Quarterly*, 45, no. 8 (2014), 456–64. Other studies are referenced in this paper below. For more historical studies, see also the work of Karen Smith, Rachel Adcock, and Linda Wilson.

[9] For one study see David Killingray, 'Black Baptists in Britain, 1640–1950', *Baptist Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2003), 69–89. See also Paul Walker's work on African-American Baptist ministers Peter Stanford, Moses Roper, and Nathaniel Paul in Britain in the early twentieth century: 'Birmingham's coloured Preacher', *Baptist Minister's Journal*, 271 (July 2000), 5–9; 'Moses Roper (1815–?): An African-American Baptist in Victorian England (1835–44)', *Baptist Quarterly*, 42, no. 4 (2007), 296–302; 'The Revd Nathaniel Paul (1793–1839): Another African-American Baptist Minister in Britain (1832–1835)', *Baptist Quarterly*, 43, no. 2 (2009), 97–111. I am unaware of any study about Black and Asian Baptists in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century, save the brief references in Ian Randall, *The English Baptists in the 20th Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2005) and Roger Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage*, 2nd edn (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2005), 230–34. For a wider ecumenical overview see John Maiden, '"Race", Black Majority Churches, and the Rise of Ecumenical Multiculturalism', *Twentieth Century British History*, 30, no. 4 (2019), 531–56.

When Margaret Jarman took up her post in 1987, she did not focus her presidency on being a woman,[10] but the fact of being the second woman to hold the position, and the first accredited woman minister,[11] did generate conversation and reflection. An edition of the *Baptist Quarterly* was dedicated to 'focus[ing] on women's participation in the life of our Baptist churches'[12] and in the *Baptist Times*, there was a series of articles on the place of women in Baptist life, including a profile of a young Pat Took, who would herself go on to become the first woman appointed a general superintendent of the Baptist Union for the London area.[13] The *Baptist Quarterly* articles were read by Jane Hassell,[14] who called a meeting of women ministers in May 1987, which led to a delegation meeting with representatives of the Baptist Colleges.[15] This organising of women ministers together began to give them a shared voice in the life of the Union. It began a new focus away from a lay-led women's work centred on fellowship and mission, and towards the issue of women and accredited ministry and their representation in denominational structures.

The meeting with the colleges resulted in the colleges making a Statement of Intent in 1990.[16] This affirmed women in ministry and in pastoral oversight; it recognised that the patterns for training had been and were inadequately supportive of women training for ministry; and it committed the colleges themselves to listening to women and their

[10] The focus of her presidency was encouraging prayer, action, and retreat spirituality. The impact of her presidency was long lasting in the founding of the Baptist Union Retreat Group. See for Jarman's reflections, Margaret Jarman, 'BURG — The Journey', Occasional Paper No. 10: <https://burg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/occ-paper-10-the-journey.pdf> [accessed 17 March 2022].

[11] Jarman had also first been a deaconess before her name was moved to the Ministerial Accredited List.

[12] 'Editorial', *Baptist Quarterly,* 31, no. 7 (July 1986), 301, with articles by Edward Lehman, Shirely Dex, Margaret Jarman, Carol McCarthy and John Briggs. Another article by Paul Fiddes appeared in the following edition 31, no. 8 (October 1986).

[13] It was a five-week series running in October and November 1987.

[14] Hassell had been minister of Victoria Park Baptist Church, Bow in London, from 1985.

[15] The colleges were Bristol, Northern, Regent's Park, South Wales, Spurgeon's and St Andrew's Hall (training centre for BMS). Ruth Gouldbourne charts the story behind this and other moves to improve the settlement process in 'Identity and Pain: Women's Consultations, 1987–1992', *Baptist Ministers' Journal*, 243 (July 1993), 8–10.

[16] Gouldbourne, 'Identity and Pain', p. 8.

experiences, encouraging women to offer themselves for service as Baptist ministers, and to providing a supportive environment for theological and ministerial formation. In addition, the colleges promised to give more attention to feminist theology, to appointing more women as tutors, and to 'being critical of ourselves and open to correction'.[17] The outcome would slowly begin to challenge and remove some of the difficulties for women becoming Baptist ministers, although the numbers being trained remained low for another twenty years. A major difficulty women faced was, of course, related to a basic resistance to their ministry. In 1988, Baptist minister David Pawson published *Leadership Is Male*[18] and this statement reflected the sentiment of a good number of ministers and churches in the Union.[19]

Following the colleges, the Baptist Union in 1992 also produced a statement of intent covering the next ten years, agreed to by the Council, that included the following declaration: 'We affirm the equality of men and women in the sight of God and recognise the ministry of women as a gift of God on an equal basis. We hope to challenge Baptist Christians to examine in a radical way their attitude to the full partnership of women and men at all levels of leadership.'[20] One issue was representation on the Council. Two attempts to pass resolutions in 1992 and 1996 failed to get a majority that would have led to an increase in women representatives. A third attempt in 2002 was more successful.[21] While this brought change to the Council, the larger question of the low numbers of women ministers continued to give concern. In 2007, Mainstream, an evangelical Baptist grouping, issued the Blackley Declaration, which spoke of a 'cultural resistance' to women ministers.[22] Richard Nicholls, the Baptist Union general

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[17] See Nigel Wright, 'Charting a Course for Liberation', *Baptist Times*, 19 July 1990, p. 6.
[18] J. David Pawson, *Leadership is Male* (Nashville: Nelson, 1988).
[19] Ian Randall reports that Douglas Sparkes feared the 'issue' could split the Union (Randall, *English Baptists,* p. 452).
[20] Baptist Union of Great Britain, *A Ten Year Plan Towards 2000* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1992), p. 10.
[21] See Andy Goodliff, 'Women and the Institution', *Journal of Baptist Theology in Context*, 1 (2020), 21–36.
[22] Mainstream North Leadership Team, 'The Blackley Declaration – January 2007', *Freshstreams* <https://freshstreams.net/wp-content/uploads/Blackley-declaration.pdf> [accessed 17 March 2022]. In 2011 Mainstream was renamed Fresh Streams.

manager, in a meeting with the regional minister team leaders spoke of an 'institutional sexism' within the Baptist Union.[23] From this a fresh attempt was made towards institutional change. The March 2010 Council gave special focus to women in leadership.[24] Out of this meeting came an acknowledgement of the historic and ongoing hurt and pain woman experienced. The resolution that resulted included identifying 'obstacles that prevent the acceptance of women for training' and committed to 'discern[ing] ways of addressing barriers to the full participation of women in all forms of leadership within BUGB'.[25] On the final morning, reflecting on the discussion that had taken place, Graham Sparkes, head of Faith and Unity, BUGB, spoke strongly that the resolution must 'send us into a new future'. He went on to say that

> commitment to the full inclusion of women in leadership is our 'norm', and those who disagree and want to be part of the family [i.e. the Union] have to reckon with that […] [Dissent] should not be a cover for prejudice and discrimination that inflicts pain and hurt on the women amongst us.[26]

In a letter to the *Baptist Times* this was perceived by Derek Tidball as a threat to those Baptist churches that did not affirm women in ministry.[27] Sparkes replied that he preferred the language of 'opportunity' to that of threat.[28]

Any momentum for more proactive action that might have emerged out of that Council meeting was interrupted by the Futures

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[23] Representatives of the BUGB Women's Justice Group, the Regional Associations, the Baptist Colleges, the BUGB staff, and Mainstream (North), 'Women in Leadership in the BUGB', unpublished briefing paper for the BUGB Faith and Unity Executive (IMC, Birmingham, UK, 31 July 2008), p. 2.

[24] It was inspired in part by the example of the Council that gave time to the apology over the issue of slavery, as discussed below.

[25] Baptist Union Council Minutes, March 2010, p. 10.

[26] Baptist Union Council Minutes, March 2010, p. 26.

[27] 'Letters', *Baptist Times,* 9 April 2010, p. 6.

[28] Sparkes's response was published on the letters page of the *Baptist Times*, 16 April 2010, p. 6. The following month, I co-wrote a letter with Neil Brighton, Craig Gardiner, and Simon Woodman arguing that the resolution of the Council was not un-Baptist but the very opposite. It was entirely appropriate for the Council to 'actively seek to promote, facilitate and encourage the ministry of women' and 'challenge those churches that disagreed' ('Letters', *Baptist Times*, 14 May 2010, p. 7).

Process,[29] begun in 2011 to deal with the pressing financial situation in the Union, and it was nearly another decade before women and ministry was again given sustained attention. It can be argued that some progress had been made when, in 2014, all four governing roles in the Baptist Union (general secretary, president, moderator of council, moderator of the trustees) were held or about to be held by women. Paul Goodliff suggested this was an 'historic moment'.[30] The moment has not been long-lasting, however. While Lynn Green has remained in post as the general secretary, since 2014 there have been no other women taking on the roles of moderator of council or of the trustees and only one other woman, Diane Tidball in 2016, has acted as president. Additionally, the number of women holding the office of regional minister has fallen. In 2018 the Union marked a hundred years of women in Baptist ministry.[31] In 2019, it appointed Jane Day as Centenary Enabler, 'to encourage and equip women in exercising their God-given gifting and leadership',[32] and as of 2021, a three-year research project, Project Violet, is beginning 'to understand more fully the theological, missional, and structural obstacles women ministers face in the Baptist community'.[33]

There are certainly more women in Baptist ministry now, and there are women in significant roles within the Union. As of the time of writing in 2021, the general secretary, the faith and society team leader,

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[29] The Futures Process took place between 2011 and 2013 in response to a large deficit in the Union's funds. It led to a second re-organisation of Baptist life, following the changes introduced in 2002.

[30] The women were Lynn Green, Jenni Entrican, Sheila Martin, and Jenny Royal. See Paul Goodliff, 'Women's Ministry: An Exploration at a Historic Moment', *Baptist Quarterly,* 45 (October 2014), 485–99.

[31] It produced a booklet, *A Short History of Baptist Women in Ministry* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2018); an edition of the *Baptists Together* magazine (Spring 2018); a book of prayers and readings called *Gathering Up the Crumbs*, by Catriona Gorton et al. (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2020); and a conference, *Celebrating, Surviving and Thriving – Women in Baptist Ministry* (IMC, Birmingham, 28–29 June 2018).

[32] 'Jane Day Appointed Centenary Enabler', *Baptist Times*, 21 August 2019: https://baptisttimes.co.uk/Articles/554164/Jane_Day_appointed.aspx> [accessed 17 March 2022].

[33] 'Launch of Project Violet', *Baptist Times*, 3 June 2021: <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/612263/Launch_of_Project.aspx.> [accessed 17 March 2022].
Named Project Violet after Violet Hedger, the first woman to train for ministry in a Baptist College.

the moderator of the ministerial recognition committee, and the president-elect for 2022 are all women.[34] There is, though, an ongoing sense that Baptists still work with an understanding of history and identity that is male. Back in 1997, Ruth Gouldbourne delivered the Whitley Lecture on the theme of women in ministry in Baptist life and argued that to take the ministry of women seriously required a 'radical questioning of the way we structure ministry, training for it, and the expectations we put on it'.[35] Her remarks remain relevant, contending that if the ministry of women is to be celebrated and recognised as a gift, 'then we need to listen to the voices from the margins, [and] accept the ministry offered from outside',[36] by which she means the context in which women exist and minister. What Gouldbourne offers is the beginnings of 'a different Baptist narrative of gender'.[37] Beth Allison-Glenny has begun to tease this out further, borrowing ideas of how gender is performative and embodied.[38]

The Summons of Race

When did the Baptist Union of Great Britain begin to engage in issues of racial justice? Through the 1970s and 1980s, the Assembly and the Council gave occasional recognition to the problem of racism[39] and made statements towards greater diversity,[40] but it was not until the mid-

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34 Lynn Green, Diane Watts, Sian Murray Williams, and Hayley Young.

35 Gouldbourne, *Reinventing the Wheel*, p. 43.

36 Gouldbourne, *Reinventing the Wheel*, pp. 44–45.

37 Beth Allison-Glenny, 'Baptist Interpretations of Scripture on the Complementarity of Male and Female', in *Gathering Disciples: Essays in Honor of Christopher J. Ellis,* ed. by Myra Blyth and Andy Goodliff (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), pp. 90–110 (p. 109). For more on Ruth Gouldbourne's theology, see Beth Allison-Glenny and Andy Goodliff, 'Appreciating Ruth', *Journal for Baptist Theology in Context*, 4 (2021), 73–82.

38 See Beth Allison-Glenny, 'Performing Baptism, Embodying Christ', in *Reconciling Rites: Essays in Honour of Myra N. Blyth,* ed. by Andy Goodliff, Anthony Clarke and Beth Allison-Glenny (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2020), pp. 23–47.

39 The British Council of Churches through its Community and Race Relations Unit (CRRU) produced a range of reports, in particular, *The New Black Presence in Britain* (London: British Council of Churches, 1976) and *Rainbow Gospel* (London: British Council of Churches, 1988). I have not been able to find (as yet) who was representing the Baptist Union in the Unit.

40 Fred George viewed this as Baptists taking 'the easy and, sometimes, futile option of pious resolutions about racism and its evil effects, without the willingness to translate words into

1990s and the creation of a Racial Justice Forum that greater action began to take place.[41] In the background was also the important, costly, and persistent local advocacy work carried out by groups in Birmingham, Leeds, Nottingham, Bristol, and London.[42] It was during the period of the 1990s that persons of colour began to take a lead themselves.[43] There had been no mention of racial justice in the Baptist Union's 'A Ten Year Plan Towards 2000', although in the accompanying 'National Mission Strategy' there was acknowledgement that a plan for the 'furthering of racial justice in our denomination needs to be devised'.[44] The Churches' Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ) was a long-standing body active in the area of challenging racism and supporting churches in this, and in the period of the 1990s the deputy moderator of the CCRJ was a Baptist, Pat White, who was also the Chair of the Union's own Racial Justice Forum.[45] In 1995, the CCRJ called for an ecumenical Racial Justice Sunday to be introduced as a response to the racially motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence in London and this was promoted by the Union. Racial Justice was made a 'priority' by the Council in March 1996.[46] The Social Action Committee organised a focus on racial justice for 1996–97, and this was given an added profile

positive action by risking change and releasing resources to challenge and combat racism in church and society'. ('Race and Racism', *Mainstream Magazine,* January 1996, p. 7)

[41] This was in part mirroring the CCBI Churches' Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ). The CCRJ and its predecessor, the CRRU, had a long history of challenging racism and resourcing the churches. Its most long-lasting initiative has been a call to churches to mark an annual Racial Justice Sunday, first held in 1995. See *Churches Together in Britain and Ireland* <https://ctbi.org.uk/category/witnessing-together/racial-justice/racial-justice-sunday/> [accessed 17 March 2022]. In 2003, it produced *Redeeming the Time: All God's People Must Challenge Racism* (London: CTBI, 2003).

[42] The *Baptist Times* featured stories of these different groups in their edition of 4 September 1997, pp. 8–9, 10. For an earlier report on the Birmingham project, Progress Within, set up in 1991 see *Baptist Times*, 16 July 1992, p. 6.

[43] Early voices on Council were Desmond Gordon (minister at Finchley Baptist Church, London, 1979–2010) and Tony O'Connor (a deacon at Acocks Green Baptist Church, Birmingham). Gordon was the founder of the Black Baptist Ministers' Forum, which later was renamed the Black and Asian Ministers' Forum.

[44] *A Ten Year Plan Towards 2000 incorporating the National Mission Strategy* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1993), p. 20.

[45] Pat White was a member of Brixton Baptist Church, London. For more see *Baptist Times*, 15 July 1993, p. 6, and 7 September 1995, p. 15.

[46] 'Council Agrees to make Pursuit of Racial Justice a Priority', *Baptist Times*, 28 March 1996, p. 3.

when Fred George was appointed president of the Baptist Union for that year. George was from Sri Lanka, had trained at Spurgeon's, been minister of East Barnet Baptist Church in London since 1970, and was a member of the Racial Justice Forum.[47] The theme of George's presidency was 'Take the Risk' and emphasised 'combatting racial injustice'. He highlighted the lack of resources in the Baptist Union for tackling racial injustice and lamented the lack of a national role on the issue.[48] As a person of colour, from the stage of a Baptist assembly, he named perhaps for the first time 'the hurt, pain, anger and brokenness of those who have for generations been marginalised and abused on grounds of race and colour'.[49] He argued that 'we have to face the painful truth that many of our Black and Asian sisters and brothers are excluded and marginalised by the institutionalised racism present in many of our churches'. He called the Assembly to 'a repentance that leads to active reconciliation'. In 1998, the London Baptist Association appointed Rosemarie Davidson as the first racial justice co-ordinator, reflecting the committed work by a few to see that the London Association ensured racial justice was part of its life, and this appointment paved the way for a similar national role.[50]

In January 1999, the issue of racial justice was taken up by the Baptist World Alliance at an International Summit in Atlanta, Georgia. A final statement, known as the Atlanta Covenant, called on Baptists worldwide to make the decade 2000–2010 a decade to promote racial justice.[51] In attendance at the summit representing the BUGB were Chris Andre-Watson,[52] David Ellis,[53] Fred George, Rosemarie

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47 See profile in *Baptist Times,* 1 May 1997, pp. 10–12.

48 Fred George, 'Take the Risk', *Baptist Times*, 4 September 1997, p. 10.

49 Fred George, '"Take the Risk", Presidential Address', *Baptist Times*, 1 May 1997, pp. 6, 15.

50 Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed is currently National Minority Ethnic Vocations Officer for the Church of England.

51 Denton Lotz, ed., *Baptists Again Racism*, Proceedings of the International Summit on Baptists Against Racism and Ethnic Conflict (Falls Church, VA: BWA, 1999).

52 Andre-Watson was a Baptist minister in Croydon, Greater London, and member of the Racial Justice Forum.

53 Ellis was a Baptist minister in Bristol and chair of the Keyboard Project, a Bristol racial justice group. His reflections on the summit can be found in Anthony Reddie, Wale Hudson-Roberts, and Gale Richards, eds, *Journeying to Justice* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2017), pp. 38–44. Ellis is currently a regional minister in the Heart of England Association.

Davidson-Gotobed, Anne Wilkinson-Hayes,[54] and Pat White.[55] At the BUGB Baptist Assembly that same May, the Union adopted the Atlanta Covenant.[56] Out of this activity for change, in 2002, the Union appointed its first national Racial Justice Advisor, Wale Hudson-Roberts.[57] In beginning his role, he said that the Baptist Union does 'not start very strongly on this issue' and that his vision was that 'there will be increasing multi-cultural participation and contribution'.[58] This made racial justice a more fixed and public part of Baptist life. Hudson-Roberts was part of the Union's mission department, and here, arguably, was one of the problems: racial justice was seen as a mission issue,[59] rather than one concerning faith and unity. In 2007, racial justice would become part of the faith and unity brief. In 2003, the London Baptist Association appointed two persons of colour as regional ministers, David Shosanya and Sivakumar Rajagopalan, and in 2006 Kate Coleman would be the second person of colour to become president of the Baptist Union. Her presidential address, 'Stay Focused', reflecting on Acts 10, argued that Baptists needed to confront presumption, prejudice, and power.[60] In terms of presumption, she highlighted the need to challenge the notion that Christianity was 'a white man's religion' and that there was no black and Asian presence in the Bible.[61] Quoting Paul Marshall, she noted that 'Christianity was in Africa before Europe, India before England, China before America'.[62] In the same

54 Wilkinson-Hayes had been social justice advisor for the Baptist Union, 1992–97.

55 Moderator, Racial Justice Forum.

56 The resolution was submitted by Brixton Baptist Church, London, and in partnership with the Black and Asian Ministers' Forum and the Task Group on Racial Justice. The context of the resolution was not just the Atlanta Covenant but also the MacPherson Report, a judicial inquiry commissioned in 1997 into the police handling of the investigation into the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence in South London in 1993.

57 A national racial justice advisor had first been suggested in 1989. Hudson-Roberts had trained at Spurgeon's and been the minister at Stroud Green Baptist Church, London.

58 Wale Hudson-Roberts, 'I'm angry that ethnics are playing second fiddle', *Baptist Times*, 3 October 2002, p. 7.

59 The Racial Justice Forum and later the Racial Justice Task Group were all initiatives within the mission department; at its beginning, it was located within the work of the social affairs brief.

60 Kate Coleman, 'Stay Focused', *Baptist Times*, 4 May 2006, pp. 12–13.

61 On this see also Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), especially pp. 96–117.

62 The quotation from Paul Marshall is taken from his work, *Their Blood Cries Out* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1997).

year Coleman was also invited to give the Whitley Lecture, which was entitled 'Being Human: A Black British Christian Woman's Perspective' and was based on her doctorate undertaken at the University of Birmingham.[63] Also in 2006, the Baptist Union published (in collaboration with the United Reformed Church) 'We Belong: Celebrating Cultural Diversity and Living Hospitality', which was a six-session study on racial justice.[64] The number of people of colour on the Council had risen to ten from only four in 1997, and their presence on the stage at the Baptist Assembly was more visible.[65]

In 2007, the United Kingdom marked the 200th anniversary of the end of the transatlantic slave trade. At the Baptist Assembly in May 2007, the BMS Director Alistair Brown and BU General Secretary Jonathan Edwards led prayers of lament. At the same Assembly, the President of the Jamaican Baptist Union Karl Henlin gave an address that called for an apology to be made and for compensation to be rendered.[66] In July, at the BWA annual gathering in Ghana, the absence of an apology from British Baptists was noticeable, and Tony Peck, the then general secretary of the European Baptist Federation, added his support for one to be made.[67] Subsequently, the BUGB trustees agreed that the November Baptist Union Council would include 'a process for a conversation concerning an apology'.[68] Over the three days of the Council, presentations, small group discussion, and plenary sessions gave space to exploring a response to the request for an apology. On

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63 See also Kate Coleman, 'Another Kind of Black', *Black Theology*, 5, no. 3 (2007), 279–304; Kate Coleman, 'Woman, Single, Christian' in *Sisters with Power*, ed. by Joe Aldred (London: Continuum, 2000), pp. 10–23.

64 It was designed for a predominantly 'white audience who do not see the relevance of racial awareness and cross-cultural training' (BUGB/URC, *We Belong: Celebrating Cultural Diversity and Living Hospitality* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2006), p. 4).

65 Robert Beckford (2000), Bev Thomas (2002), Paul Boateng, Joel Edwards, Kate Coleman (2000), John Sentamu (2005), Karl Henlin, Les Isaac, Joe Kapolyo (2007), Neville Callum (2009), and Kwame Adzam (2010).

66 A copy of Henlin's address can be found in *Journeying to Justice*, ed. by Reddie et al., pp. 49–55.

67 'I do not think that it is too late to make [an apology] to our Jamaican Baptists brothers and sisters […] [F]or me the Dutch statement at the Cape Coast was a model to us which I hope we will follow.' (Tony Peck, 'Letter to the Editor', *Baptist Times*, 19 July 2007, p. 8)

68 Wale Hudson-Roberts, 'The Apology: A Journey Towards Justice', in *Journeying to Justice*, ed. by Reddie et al., pp. 70–82 (p. 72).

the final day, an apology was offered, in which the following words were used:

> We offer our apology to God and to our brothers and sisters for all that has created and still perpetuates the hurt which originated from the horror of slavery.[69]

It was called a *kairos* and a 'Pentecost' moment.[70] This was not just about the past, but about the present as well. In addition to the apology, a resolution was passed that the Union would 'continue to develop ways of promoting racial justice'. The theology that was offered around the apology was that of the African concept of *ubuntu*, which speaks of a corporate identity: '"my" humanity and the humanity of the whole community are profoundly interconnected.'[71] Jonathan Edwards also spoke of being part of a 'communion of saints, who brought their history with them'.[72] The Council meeting and the apology had a profound effect on those present, but translating this to the wider Baptist constituency was not straightforward.[73] At the 2008 Baptist Assembly, although the apology was talked about, there was no attempt to see it given official support from the Assembly.[74] Following the apology, the Union initiated what was named the 'Journey Process' in

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[69] The Apology in full can be read online: The Baptist Union of Great Britain, 'Faith and Society Files: The Apology for Slavery', November 2007, *Baptists Together* <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=111235&view=browser> [accessed 23 February 2022].

[70] Jenny Williams, 'Slavery Apology Unites Council in "Act of God"', *Baptist Times*, 22 November 2007, p. 1. See also this report on the Apology delivered in Jamaica, Paul Hobson, 'Slavery Apology to be Delivered in Jamaica', *Baptist Times*, 22 May 2008, p. 1.

[71] Richard Kidd, 'Memory and Communion', in *Baptists and the Communion of Saints* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2014), p. 46. For more on *ubuntu* see Joe Kapolyo, *The Human Condition: Christian Perspectives Through African Eyes* (Leicester: IVP, 2005), pp. 34–40.

[72] Baptist Union Council Minutes, 21 November 2007. For further reflection on a theology of the communion of saints, see Paul Fiddes, Brian Haymes, and Richard Kidd, *Baptists and the Communion of Saints* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014). For a wider discussion of church, sin, and the past, see Jeremy Bergen, *Ecclesial Repentance* (London: T & T Clark, 2011).

[73] See BUGB, *Lest We Forget* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2018).

[74] I make this point because there was perhaps a missed opportunity. It has been argued that the Union has two means of discerning and decision-making. One is the Union's Council and the second is the Assembly. In a 1994 report, the Doctrine and Worship Committee argued that 'the Assembly is a more comprehensive expression of the Union than the Council […] [I]t seems to have more potential than the Council for creating trust across all the churches' (*The Nature of the Assembly and the Council of Baptist Union of Great Britain* (Didcot: Baptist Union, 1994), p. 20).

2011, with the aim of making the apology concrete in Baptist life and structures. The result has been mixed. Resources have been created,[75] an annual lecture in memory of the Jamaican Baptist deacon and slave Sam Sharpe has been inaugurated,[76] three more people of colour have held the post of president of the Union,[77] and a closer relationship with the Jamaican Baptist Union has developed.[78] One other area of work to be mentioned as part of this journey comes at the intersection of race and gender. For example, Gale Richards, Leoner Gardner-Howard, and Carol Moore co-convened the BME (Black and minority ethnic) Women's Ministers Network between 2014 and 2019, which sought to be a safe space and place of support for the around twenty-five Baptist women ministers of colour.[79]

In 2018, Hudson-Roberts reflected that the application of the journey process had been 'painfully slow'.[80] The apology was, and is, a definite marker in English Baptist history, but a racially just Union remains elusive. Due to the public outcry after the death of George Floyd in May 2020 in the United States of America, racial justice has been back on the agenda.[81] Within the churches, the cry to be heard by people of colour has found new strength[82] and there is the possibility

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[75] Gale Richards, *Text and Story* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2014); BUGB, *Pentecost People* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2017); *Lest We Forget* (2018); and the book *Journeying to Justice: Contributions to the Baptist Tradition across the Black Atlantic*, ed. by Anthony Reddie et al. (Paternoster, 2017).

[76] Lecturers have included Robert Beckford, Neville Callum, Joel Edwards, Bev Thomas, and Rose Hudson-Wilkin. This has been part of a wider project, see *The Sam Sharpe Project* <http://www.samsharpeproject.org/> [accessed 22 February 2022].

[77] Kingsley Appiagyei (2009); Rupert Lazar (2016); and Yinka Oyekan (2020).

[78] In 2014, the Union marked 200 years of partnership with the Jamaican Baptists and produced a souvenir booklet.

[79] See also Michele Mahon, 'Sisters with Voices: A Study of the experiences and challenges faced by Black women in London Baptist Association Church Ministry Settings', *Black Theology: An International Journal*, 13, no. 3 (2015), 273–96.

[80] Wale Hudson-Roberts, 'Conclusion', in *Lest We Forget* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2018), p. 21.

[81] Responses from the within the Baptist Union can be found at 'George Floyd — I Can't Breathe' <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/345102/George_Floyd_I.aspx> [accessed 17 March 2022].

[82] See the different contributions to the Baptists Together Racial Justice blog <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/350290/Racial_Justice_Blogs.aspx> [accessed 22 February 2022].

among Baptists of a second *kairos* moment that will take further steps forwards on the journey towards justice. It might be observed that while a number of men have for a long time partnered with women in making the case for gender justice,[83] white people have been less vocal in terms of making the case for racial justice.[84] For example, the *Baptist Ministers' Journal* and the *Baptist Quarterly* have given race no real attention,[85] and equally there has been no in-depth theological[86] and historical reflection on race prior to 2007 from the Union or British Baptist theologians.[87]

A More Just Baptist Agenda

This short article is part of a planned larger piece of work that aims to tell the story of how the Baptist Union of Great Britain has changed and is changing. Both women and people of colour have found some positive change, but this has not been without struggle, and understandable frustration and anger remains.[88] This reflects what Willie

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[83] For example, Simon Woodman, 'A Biblical Basis for Affirming Women in Ministry', *Baptist Ministers' Journal*, 296 & 297 (2007), 8–13 and 10–15 respectively.

[84] Although see the contributions from Steve Latham, 'A White Guy Talks Race', and Richard Kidd, 'An Ongoing Apology', in *Journeying to Justice*, ed. by Anthony Reddie et al., pp. 83–93, and pp. 177–81 respectively.

[85] In over 300 editions of the *Baptist Ministers' Journal*, and over 1000 articles, I found 16 articles that address questions of race, of which 7 were written by people of colour. In the case of the *Baptist Quarterly*, in its hundred-year history, articles that discuss people of colour number probably no more than 10, and authors of colour number less than 5.

[86] In one rare *Baptist Times* comment piece on racism, Brian Haymes, then principal of Northern Baptist College, wrote about taking part in racism awareness training and of recognising 'an incipient racism in all of us, and in the structures of our society' ('The racism in All of Us', *Baptist Times*, 6 February 1992, p. 4).

[87] To take one example, in *New Baptists, New Agenda* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), Nigel Wright begins by saying he hopes '[this book] might become a resource for thinking about the identity and direction of Baptist churches throughout the first decade of this century' (p. ix); there is no mention of race or racial justice. It has not been on the agenda of white scholars. See also Julian Gotobed, 'A Challenge to Change: British Baptists and Racism (1990–1999)', unpublished paper given at Hearts and Minds Conference (South Wales Baptist College, 2018), and Julian Gotobed, 'Diseased Imaginations and Desire: Ecclesial and Racist Convictions in Baptists', unpublished paper given at Theology Live Conference (London, 2019).

[88] The letters pages of the *Baptist Times* in the period under review demonstrated a fairly regular debate over the validity of women in ministry and how to respond to racism, often unedifying in tone.

James Jennings has called Christianity's 'diseased social imagination'.[89] A Baptist identity that embodies justice has a long way to go.

I want as a way of conclusion to turn to a small essay written twenty years ago by Richard Kidd.[90] In this essay Kidd argued that the concerns and practice of early Baptist theology and those of theologies of liberation have some similarities, and he suggests that this should still be true today.[91] 'Theologies of liberation', he says, 'are concerned with transformation', often of institutional structures, and therefore 'Baptists should find something of a natural home in liberation circles'.[92] He finds overlap between Baptists and liberation theology around the themes of Scripture, community, mission, discipleship, and conversion.

In his conclusion, Kidd puts forward a tentative Baptist agenda around what he sees as five parameters. The first parameter is what he terms a 'proper measure of tentativeness associated with beliefs'.[93] It is not that we do not know, but it is that we cannot possibly know all. Second comes a humility that 'majors on listening rather than speaking'[94] and particularly on listening to those without power and privilege. This is about an openness to act not as teacher, but as one needing to be taught. Third, a liberating Baptist agenda requires 'attention to matters of power'.[95] Power is everywhere present, and therefore it requires that we recognise how it is used and for what purposes. Fourth is the importance of staying — of staying in the struggle, of staying in the

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[89] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale, 2010), p. 6. From a UK perspective, see Anthony G. Reddie, *Theologising Brexit* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

[90] Richard Kidd was principal of Northern Baptist College, Manchester, 1994–2013.

[91] Richard Kidd, 'Baptists and Theologies of Liberation', in *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way*, ed. by Paul S. Fiddes, Brian Haymes, Richard L. Kidd, and Michael Quicke (Oxford: Whitley, 2000), pp. 39–52.

[92] Kidd, 'Baptists', p. 46.

[93] Kidd, 'Baptists', p. 51. The implications of this have been explored by Sean Winter, *More Light and Truth?* (Oxford: Whitley, 2007); Helen J. Dare, *Always on the Way and in the Fray* (Oxford: Whitley, 2014); and more recently Helen Dare, 'Remembering our Hermeneutics: Baptists Reconciling (with) Interpretative Diversity', in *Reconciling Rites*, ed. by Andy Goodliff et al., pp. 48–70.

[94] Kidd, 'Baptists', p. 51. On listening, see also Ryan Andrew Newson, *Inhabiting the World: Identity, Politics and Theology in a Radical Baptist Perspective* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 2018), pp. 21–25.

[95] Kidd, 'Baptists', p. 51. For one helpful study of power by a Baptist, see Roy Kearsley, *Church, Community and Power* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

institution — with what Kidd calls a 'proper sense of dissent, a non-conformism, which always keeps us living near an edge'.[96] The final parameter, Kidd states, is the necessity to work in the context we have inherited and to use any such power that we have to 'strive to enable that peculiar community of equals, which we find uniquely modelled in the example of Jesus'.[97] I am not aware of anyone taking up Kidd's agenda. It stands as a minority report. It offers, though, the possibility of one way of pursuing a more just Baptist identity. An identity that makes space for the experiences, confessions, and stories[98] of women, and of people of colour, and also for those of people with a disability, people who are LGBT, and people who are not yet adults, all of which might lead Baptists to live an 'ongoing apology'[99] and hopefully to realise what it is to be a gospel people together committed to being prophetic, inclusive, sacrificial, missionary, and worshipping communities.[100]

[96] Kidd, 'Baptists', p. 52. This finds echoes with Gouldbourne, *Reinventing the Wheel*, pp. 44–45.
[97] Kidd, 'Baptists', p. 52.
[98] On the phrasing of experiences, confessions, and stories see Paul Fiddes, 'Theology and a Baptist Way of Community', in *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way*, ed. by Paul Fiddes et al., pp. 19–27.
[99] Kidd, 'Ongoing Apology', in *Journeying to Justice*, ed. by Anthony Reddie et al., pp. 177–81.
[100] This is a reference to the Baptist Union publication *5 Core Values for a Gospel People* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1999). See Andy Goodliff, *Renewing a Modern Denomination* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020), pp. 14–15, 132–134.

Degrees of Separation: An Exploration of Issues Arising from the Current Financial Relationship of UK Baptist Churches and the State

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Abstract:
This paper presents evidence to demonstrate a dependency among Baptist churches in the United Kingdom upon the state for their financial survival. It reviews a range of tax allowances and exemptions available to Baptist churches. It assesses the scale and impact of the three most usually accessed on an annual basis. The operant theology of Baptist churches is explored through examination of the published accounts of thirty churches of various sizes. The evidence of practice is contrasted with the espoused, normative, and formal Baptist principle of the separation of church and state. It includes some theological reflections on matters arising from the exploration, including possibly adverse aspects of charitable status, and proposes further study.

Keywords:
Baptist; finance; tax; separation of church and state; charity

Introduction

While church and state may each work for the common good, a distinctive of Baptist theology is that they best function separately. This article presents evidence to demonstrate a reliance among UK Baptist churches[1] upon the state for their continuing financial survival. The operant theology under which this takes place is contrasted with espoused, normative, and formal Baptist principles. It includes some theological reflection on matters arising from the study, including a call for the further exploration of how charitable status has affected Baptist polity and witness. Two strands of thought have led to this exploration.

[1] For the purposes of this study, the term 'Baptist churches' refers to churches in membership of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB).

a. Baptist Churches' Annual Budget Cycle

The first is the annual budget cycle typically found in UK Baptist churches. The church treasurer, in discussion with the pastor and other leaders, will bring a draft budget for the following twelve months to the church members' meeting for prayerful discussion and approval. While there may be additional items, the budget generally comprises incremental adjustments to former years' costs to offset the effects of inflation. However, recently there have been two exceptional factors:

(i) Ministerial stipend is often the largest component in the annual budget. Churches which have, or have had, ministers in membership of the Baptist Pension Fund faced a deficit recovery surcharge as a percentage of ministerial stipend to address a shortfall in the capital fund supporting the pension scheme, though this is now reducing.

(ii) Covid-19 has resulted in churches not meeting in person and in many cases a loss of lettings income for those whose buildings are regularly used by other organisations or community groups, so increasing a dependency upon other income streams, particularly tax-efficient giving by members.

It was curiosity about the scale of this latter stream of income that led to the limited research set out in the Appendix and which I explore in greater depth below. The more churches rely upon any single income stream, the greater the care required to ensure that this is both financially prudent and consistent with Baptist values. My curiosity was greatly increased by an article in *The Huffington Post* on the dependency of the Church of England upon tax relief, which contained the following startling claim:

> The Church of England […] has reported that 60% of its income comes from Gift Aid and if the church were forced to pay taxes, it would cease to exist.[2]

To what extent are UK Baptist churches in the same position?

[2] Sophie Turton, 'If the Churches Paid Taxes', *Huffington Post,* last updated 13 June 2014 <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/sophie-turton/church-taxes_b_5144964.html> [accessed 4 December 2020].

b. Compromised by choices?

A second prompt for this study arose from reaction to two speeches made by The Most Reverend Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury. Dr Welby has made several social policy speeches in recent years. In a speech on 20 June 2013,[3] he promoted credit unions while condemning the prevalence of pay-day loans bearing extremely high rates of interest. Addressing the Trades Union Congress in 2018,[4] he drew attention to hardships associated with the introduction of Universal Credit[5] and the social problems attending zero-hours contracts. The press coverage of these speeches drew attention to apparent conflicts with the operant practices of the Anglican church, undermining the effect of the archbishop's statements. In other words, the actions of the church were seen to be at odds with its public stance. Therefore, the church was ill-placed to issue a challenge on issues in which it might be thought to be compromised, financially or culturally, by apparently contrary actions. The same question might be raised here: are Baptist voices compromised by our funding choices?

Methodology

For this study, I have adopted a simplified version of the Four Voices of Theology model[6] created by Helen Cameron et al.[7] The four voices specified are as follows:

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[3] Archbishop Justin Welby, 'Alternatives to Payday Lending', *House of Lords Debate* (20 June 2013, volume number 746, column number 485): <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldhansrd/text/130620-0003.htm> [accessed 4 December 2020].

[4] Justin Welby, 'Archbishop of Canterbury's Speech at the Trades Union Congress' (Manchester, 12 September 2018): <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/speeches/archbishop-canterburys-speech-tuc> [accessed 4 December 2020].

[5] A UK state benefit intended to assist people on low income or who are unemployed with their living costs.

[6] I am grateful to my colleague and pastor, Revd Pamela Davies, for introducing me to this model.

[7] H. Cameron, D. Bhatti, C. Duce, J. Sweeney, and C. Watkins, *Talking about God in Practice* (London: SCM Press, 2010), pp. 53–58.

a. Operant theology — that which is embedded within a group's actual practices.

b. Espoused theology — that which is anchored within the group's articulation of its beliefs and values.

c. Normative theology — including scripture, official church teachings and patterns of behaviour, and the faith community's orthopraxy.

d. Formal theology — theological analysis and interdisciplinary dialogue.

The intention of discerning the four voices in a specific situation is to gain a better understanding of the issues, how they have come about, and how well they 'speak' to one another. Cameron et al. have found this tool to be a 'fairly straightforward way of disclosing important tensions',[8] particularly where the operant theology of practitioners has been awkwardly dissonant with normative or formal theology. In exploring this matter using this framework, it is hoped that the investigation will result in 'an epiphany or moment of disclosure',[9] leading to a transformative outcome.

Evidence of State Financial Aid

At the heart of this article is the contention that the operant theology of UK Baptist churches is that they depend, to a greater or lesser extent, upon state reliefs and exemptions from tax in order to function in their normative mode. What follows is a brief survey of some tax-related sources of income for churches as charities, with an estimate of their actual or potential value. It does not include contracts for service delivery. The material is set out in chart form (figure 1) and presents the main sources of tax-relief income open to churches, along with a brief explanatory description of what this means in practice.

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[8] Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice*, p. 146.

[9] C. Watkins, 'Practising Ecclesiology: From Product to Process', *Ecclesial Practices*, 2, no. 1 (2015), 23–39.

It is important to state at the outset that I have found nothing to suggest that any of the following is unethical or of itself imprudent. However, taking a collective view of what is set out below does raise legitimate questions about the extent of the repetitive reliance of churches upon the goodwill of the state even if, pragmatically, these benefits both our continued existence in normative mode and our mission.

Figure 1: Chart setting out the main sources of tax-relief income open to churches, along with a brief explanatory description of what this means in practice.

Category	**Details**
Tax relief on gifts made by individuals under the Gift Aid scheme[a]	From 1990, Gift Aid allows individuals who are subject to UK income tax to complete a short declaration that they are an income taxpayer. Financial donations made to a registered charity after making a declaration are treated as being made after the deduction of income tax at the basic rate (20% in 2021), and the charity can reclaim the basic rate income tax paid on the gift from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). For a basic-rate taxpayer, this adds 25% to the value of any gift made under Gift Aid. Higher-rate taxpayers can claim income tax relief at their marginal rate.
Manses[b]	The standard terms of appointment of a minister of a Baptist church provide that living accommodation ('manse') will generally be made available for the better performance of their duties. Owing to an exception in taxation law,[c] the provision of such 'customary' accommodation will not give rise to any taxable benefit. The notional value of this for pension purposes in 2020 was £6248 per annum.

Category	Details
Tax relief on certain manse expenses[d]	Certain payments associated with the provision of manse accommodation are, like the benefit of the accommodation itself, also exempt from charge to income tax. These include Council Tax (a local taxation on domestic property), water/sewerage charges, buildings insurance, structural repairs and alterations, exterior decoration, and the maintenance and replacement of landlord's fixtures. No taxable benefit arises if a minister is provided with a telephone landline, broadband, or mobile telephone for exclusively church business use.
Tax reliefs available to ministers of religion[d]	A church may contribute towards 'qualifying' relocation costs of a minister up to a total of £8000 without giving rise to any tax liability on the part of the minister. The payment of a motor mileage allowance in respect of church business journeys will not give rise to a taxable benefit provided such allowance is within the HMRC approved rates (currently 45 pence per mile for the first 10 000 church business miles per annum and 25 pence per mile thereafter). Ministers may include in their tax returns a claim for any expenses incurred in the performance of their duties which have not already been reimbursed on a 'tax-free' basis by the church. In addition to claiming any allowable manse light and heat expenses, expenses may include a salary paid to a spouse (or another person) for manse cleaning and/or secretarial duties, laundry of ministerial vestments, books and periodicals, and subscriptions to professional bodies.

Category	Details
	A minister is also entitled to claim (for the year of expenditure) a 100% investment allowance under the capital allowances regime in respect of expenditure on computers and other office equipment used for church business purposes.
Exemptions from Value Added Tax (VAT) due on new church buildings[e]	The construction of a new church building, subject to the issue to the builder of the appropriate certificate that it is for non-business/charitable purposes, will be zero-rated for VAT. Construction of a new church hall will also generally qualify for zero-rating, as will construction of a new manse. In the few cases where Baptist church buildings are listed, there may be conditional relief from VAT on their maintenance.[f]
Exemption from Corporation Tax on profits from 'primary purpose' trading and some VAT reliefs[g]	As charities, churches are exempt from tax on profits arising from a trading activity if the trade forms part of the primary purpose of the charity and such profits are used only for the purposes of the charity. HMRC has indicated that the operation of, for example, a church coffee shop will be regarded as 'primary purpose' trading where it forms part of a church's outreach activities.
Capital Gains Tax (CGT)[h]	As charities, churches are exempt from CGT if any chargeable assets are realised and wholly applied for charitable purposes. Donations of capital assets which would otherwise be chargeable capital gains will similarly be exempted from CGT.
Business rates relief on church buildings[i]	A property in England and Wales that is a 'place of public religious worship' is wholly exempt from business rates if

Category	Details
	a. it is registered and certified as a place of worship under the Places of Worship Registration Act 1855; or b. it is a church hall, chapel hall or similar building used in connection with a place of worship.

Three Main Areas of Tax Relief Available to Churches

Gift Aid

Among the most frequently accessed of the direct reliefs described in figure 1 is Gift Aid. To gauge the scale of the benefit, in autumn 2020 the most recently published and independently examined accounts were reviewed from thirty Baptist churches affiliated to the Eastern Baptist Association in the United Kingdom.

Figure 1 Notes

Note: HMRC is the UK state tax collection agency.

[a] UK Government, 'Tax relief when you donate to a charity' <https://www.gov.uk/donating-to-charity/Gift Aid> [accessed 4 December 2020].

[b] Baptist Union of Great Britain, 'Financial Guidance' <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/220709/Financial_Guidance.aspx> [accessed 4 December 2020].

[c] Section 99(2) of the Income Tax (Earnings & Pensions) Act 2003 (UK Public General Acts 2003 c.1 <https://www. legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/1/contents> [accessed 17 March 2022]).

[d] Baptist Union of Great Britain, 'Leaflet X03: Taxation Guidance Notes for Churches and Ministers' (Revised October 2020) <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/368823/Leaflet_X03_Taxation.aspx> [accessed 4 December 2020].

[e] HM Revenue and Customs, 'VAT Notice 708: Buildings and Construction', *GOV.UK* (updated 20 July 2018) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vat-notice-708-buildings-and-construction/vat-notice-708-buildings-and-construction> [accessed 4 December 2020].

[f] UK Government Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 'Listed places of worship grant scheme' <http://www.lpwscheme.org.uk> [accessed 4 December 2020].

[g] UK Government, 'Charities and Trading' <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/charities-and-trading> [accessed 4 December 2020].

[h] UK Government, 'Charities and Tax' <https://www.gov.uk/charities-and-tax/tax-reliefs> [accessed 4 December 2020].
[i] UK Public General Acts, 'S11, Schedule 5 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988' (as currently amended), *GOV.UK* <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/41/schedule/5> [accessed 4 December 2020].

While not a statistically significant sample, efforts were made to ensure a fair spread of subject churches. A wide range of size of membership and local demography is represented. The full data are shown in Appendix A. The main points of the findings are set out below. For the thirty churches sampled,

- the total tax reclaimed in the most recent figures available is £544 298 based upon a total income of £5.12 million;
- 28 of the 30 churches reclaimed tax;
- the one with the greatest benefit derived 17% of its annual income from recovered tax (£31 325);
- the largest monetary amount reclaimed was £55 150;
- the mean figure showed 11.23% of annual income deriving from Gift Aid across the churches.

What can be seen from these figures is that tax recovered under the Gift Aid scheme comprises a significant proportion of the annual income of most of the churches surveyed.

Manses

In 2020, the notional value of the provision of accommodation for a minister for pension purposes was assessed as £6248.[10] If this relief were to be withdrawn, the accommodation would become a taxable benefit for the minister and it is likely that HMRC would want to consider the market rental value of the manse: typically, a four-bedroomed house at £10 000–£15 000 per year; more within Greater London. The church might continue to pay Council Tax (between £1000–£2500) and water rates (another £1000). So, if HMRC did start treating manses as a benefit in kind, they would tax the minister on a total of £15 000–£20 000 benefit, resulting in additional tax of £3000 to £4000 per year. No

[10] Baptist Union of Great Britain, 'Financial Guidance': <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/220709/Financial_Guidance.aspx> [accessed 4 December 2020].

opinion is offered here about whether this might be a fair outcome, given that church members may routinely face these costs. However, this additional cost might have a decisive effect upon the capacity of ministers to live within their stipend, bringing pressure to bear on the church to uprate the stipend to compensate — an increase they might be unable to meet.

In 2016, HMRC engaged in a 'call for evidence' with a view to determining whether changes should be made to the basis of calculating any taxable benefit derived from the provision of accommodation. Bodies representing the churches mounted a determined campaign to persuade HMRC not to make any changes, and the agency eventually decided not to pursue the matter for the time being. However, the possibility of change has not gone away. HMRC is also looking at the withdrawal of the exemption in the case of such accommodation provided for employees in the higher education sector, for example Oxford and Cambridge colleges, on the grounds that it is no longer 'customary' for accommodation to be provided.[11]

Business Rate Relief

An example of a significant indirect relief is that places of worship are exempt from the business rate levied on commercial premises of equivalent size. This study is unaware of any systematic estimate of the scale of this relief in monetary terms across the BUGB churches. It is likely to be hugely significant in relation to costs saved by each local congregation, as the vast majority will have qualifying buildings. As an illustration, in 2020 a building with an area of 300m^2 might attract an annual business rate of £17 185 before any adjustments at the discretion of a local authority.[12]

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[11] I was introduced to this possibility during a conversation in March 2019 with the honorary tax advisor to the BUGB, to whom I am grateful for the information.

[12] HM Revenue and Customs, 'Find your business rates valuation', *GOV. UK* <https://www.tax.service.gov.uk/business-rates-find/properties/1226643023> [accessed 4 December 2020], and HM Revenue and Customs, 'Estimate your business rates', *GOV. UK* <https://www.gov.uk/calculate-your-business-rates> [accessed 4 December 2020]. It would be impossible to find a single example to cover the vast range of sizes and configurations of church buildings. So, for illustrative purposes, I took a 300m^2 area building which was until recently a car showroom and service area in the south-east Essex town of Shoeburyness. This had a £35

An Illustration of the Annual Impact of Tax Reliefs

Simply taking the mean Gift Aid yield in Appendix A, the notional market rental value of the manse and associated provision, and the indicative benefit of exemption from business rates, a middle-range Baptist church among the thirty sampled within the Eastern Baptist Association would lose £18 143 in the current year from the loss of Gift Aid, a further £17 185 from the imposition of business rates on its building, and face the probable additional cost of £4000 in terms of stipend to allow ministers to absorb the assessed taxable benefit of the accommodation and its associated costs. At full costs this would add a total additional burden of £39 328, rendering several of the 30 churches liable to immediate closure and representing a 25.6% loss to the annual income of the median church in the sample. This would inevitably lead to major changes in the internal capacity and missional work of churches; in many cases it would result in closure.

Having examined the evidence presented so far, some qualification may be necessary:

(i) While some reliefs outlined above are specific to churches, some will apply to *all* registered UK charities and/or to all mainstream religions, not just to churches in general or specifically to Baptist churches. However, we might ask if churches should not aim for a higher standard than simply 'benchmarking' against other agencies. It could be argued that we should arrive at a relationship with the state that is appropriate to our unique values, involving some uncomfortable questions and outcomes. I suggest that 'we are no different to other charities or religions' should be an awkward position for Baptists to defend.

(ii) Some of the reliefs described are occasional or are rarely accessed by churches. For example, it is relatively uncommon for churches to commission new buildings.

(iii) I had the privilege of serving as a Baptist church treasurer from 1989 to 1996 and often made the point in members' meetings that, in Gift Aid, the government was waiving 'our' tax. I now

000 rateable value. Using the government's published formula, the annual business rates due (before any local discounts) would be £17 185.

regard this as a specious argument: the money is not returned to the free disposal of the donor. Once again, we depend upon the agency of the state to make a gift in support of the church and its work.

(iv) There are many possible changes to the external environment that might result in a less favourable relationship between church and state. However, the current essentially stable and mutually respectful relationship may evolve in non-threatening ways over time. This might occur through evolving case law, where conflict between different human rights might result in a rebalancing of status. The Ashers Bakery case[13] is just such an example of conflicting rights resulting in an adjustment to the law of freedom of conscience. Alternatively, adjustments to the tax and regulatory framework over time may impinge upon existing benefits. These are simply plausible possibilities.

Having undertaken this outline survey of the financial reliefs available to churches as churches, as well as those for which they qualify as charities, it is apparent that the state's financial investment in Baptist churches (by tax relief, exemptions, special conditions, and others) constitutes a significant proportion of most churches' annual income. This would tend to justify serious reflection upon the consequences of

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[13] UK Supreme Court, 'Lee v. Ashers Baking Co. Ltd & Another [2015] NICty 2' (19 May 2015) <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/uksc-2017-0020.html> [accessed 4 December 2020]; the appeal decision is listed as [2016] NICA 39; the Supreme Court judgement is listed as [2018] UKSC 49. The plaintiff (Mr Lee) brought an action alleging discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation against the owners of the Ashers Bakery in Northern Ireland when, having accepted a commission to bake a cake with a legend supportive of gay marriage, this was subsequently declined on the basis of a claimed conflict with the Christian faith of the bakery owners. Despite a popular misconception that this matter was about freedom of belief alone, in essence this case was concerned with resolving which of two human rights should prevail in the circumstances: the right to freedom of expression or the right to freedom of conscience (here represented by the freedom not to be obliged to promote a view with which one strongly disagreed). This question of apparently conflicting rights is of relevance to churches and other religious bodies because they enjoy an exception from some of the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. The general trend is towards the extension of equality in society. Therefore, future cases may alter the balance of human rights, where they conflict, in favour of greater equality and reducing the exceptions enjoyed by religious bodies. This may, in turn, lead to primary legislation to amend schedule 23 of the Equality Act which grants religious bodies their exemptions. This scenario arose during a conversation with Revd Peter Thomas and Mr Nick Tavener in October 2018, to whom I am grateful.

deriving so great a proportion of each year's income from the goodwill of the state.

Charitable Status and Churches

The reliefs seen above mostly derive from the charitable status of churches. An accommodation was reached by BUGB with the Charity Commission in 2006: Baptist Churches with an annual income over £100 000 need to be registered with the Charity Commission; churches with an income under £100 000 are currently 'excepted from registration' by law. The excepting regulations were due to expire in March 2021 but are being extended for a further ten years.[14] Anecdotal evidence reflects a sustained increase in the demands upon registered churches (as with all charities) to comply with higher regulatory standards, especially regarding finance. This is driven by the size and turnover of the charitable sector and the potential for abuse of public funds.[15]

It is worth noting that several commentators have pondered whether the Charity Commission will continue to be content for the advancement of religion — a legally recognised purpose (or 'head') of charity justifying the charitable status of churches and other faith communities — to remain charitable in the longer term. The National Secular Society actively campaigns for the removal of religion as a head of charity.[16]

I would contend that there should be further reflection on whether the charitable status of Baptist churches is sufficiently consistent with our values or if we should be seeking a different kind of relationship with the state.

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[14] Baptist Union of Great Britain, 'Charity Registration' <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/220752/Charity_Registration.aspx> [accessed 28 January 2021].

[15] National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 'Fast Facts about the Charity Sector' <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/briefings/1721-fast-facts-about-the-charity-sector> [accessed 29 January 2021].

[16] National Secular Society, 'For the Public Benefit? The Case for Removing the Advancement of Religion as a Charitable Purpose' <https://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/nss-advancement-of-religion-charity-report-(electronic).pdf> [accessed 28 January 2021].

Espoused Theology: Some Reflections

Any apparent conflict between the operant and espoused theology of

UK Baptist churches regarding state fiscal aid and exemptions arises from the fact that Baptists have historically seen church and state as having separate, though complementary, roles to play in society. Early Baptist Thomas Helwys wrote,

> The King is a mortal man, and not God, therefore he hath no power over the mortal soul of his subjects to make laws and ordinances for them and to set spiritual Lords over them.[17]

Helwys was arguing for liberty of conscience and for the church to be governed by God alone, interpreted through the consciences of church members. However, I think we may well ask whether his successors have too readily embraced laws and ordinances made for the church by the state, and whether the Charity Commissioners are exercising regulatory 'lordship'. The Charity Commission has published guidance on how churches and other religious charities may comply with the legal requirement to fulfil their obligation to demonstrate 'public benefit'.[18] It may not for much longer be enough to fulfil the requirement by simply opening the doors of our buildings for public worship. Who, then, decides what qualifies as the public benefit upon which we depend for valuable tax reliefs? Roger Hayden reminds us that

> under Cromwell, when the traditional relationships between church and state were widely debated, Baptists faced a number of awkward questions. For example, should Baptist ministers take payment from the state when it offered to finance godly ministers? Particular Baptists generally answered negatively […] [O]nce the Commonwealth was over, the conviction that the Lord's people should support the Lord's work took hold and became the norm for Baptist churches.[19]

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[17] A handwritten inscription inserted into a copy of Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity (1611)* presented to King James I (R. Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2005), p. 24).

[18] Charity Commission for England and Wales, 'The Advancement of Religion for the Public Benefit', *GOV.UK*:
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/358531/advancement-of-religion-for-the-public-benefit.pdf> [accessed 28 January 2021].

[19] Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage*, p. 73.

This principle articulated by our early Baptist forebears has been a key distinctive of our theology and practice. As Nigel Wright says,

> Dissenters are inclined to see church and state as in principle incommensurate and therefore resist the idea of a church state alliance or establishment. Any binding partnership between them is therefore a conjunction of forces that are at best awkward bedfellows and at worst mutually subversive.[20]

It might be suggested that state support with respect to tax reliefs is a recognition of the contribution that churches make to social capital and the common good. However welcome such recognition may be, the state and the church have values which are far from identical. When a church has a substantial reliance upon the state as a source of income, how might this affect both its willingness and its moral right to speak prophetically in the public arena? In the event of a significant change in the relationship between state and church — by choice or through unilateral action — leading to the withdrawal of some of the benefits churches receive, how would UK Baptist churches fare? Wright, once again observes,

> Even at times when the state is well disposed to the churches, even to the point of giving financial support to socially useful projects, it is wise to be cautious and to avoid any arrangements that will bind the church to becoming something it does not wish to be.[21]

We have already asked whether it is prudent for Baptist churches to draw, regularly and perhaps with inadequate reflection on the possible consequences, a significant proportion of their annual income from the goodwill of a third-party that does not share its core values. A counter argument to this would be to say that there is no clean money, and that funds invested in church work may be unclean in their origin but redeemed in their application. However, the key point here, surely, is not the point of origin as such but the degree to which structural dependency upon external sources risks jeopardising the power and clarity of the church's message, to itself and to others.

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[20] Nigel G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005), pp. 210–211.
[21] Wright, *Free church, Free State,* p. 211.

It might be argued here that while the separation of church and state has historically been a defining Baptist principle, this is currently much more honoured in theory than in practice; upheld in the academy and literature but weaker in our operant theology. Based on current practice, it may not feel as though church/state separation is under threat or that this would be a serious loss. I would argue that this of itself should lead us to be more reflective upon the issue. The danger is that choices made by the denomination and by individual churches on the matters discussed here have evolved more through pragmatism than arising out of deeper theological reflection. This may be, as Paul Fiddes has suggested, because some churches have 'lost their memory of the Baptist story […] joining the Union with little or no deep understanding of the Baptist tradition'.[22]

Church and state have separate but complementary roles in God's economy; when each plays its part, society benefits. But both parties must honour their own and the other's different roles and values. Therefore, we might ask: Have we entered our current financial and regulatory relationship with the state in full awareness and in good conscience? Are we aware of any erosion in our distinctive identity?

Normative and Formal Theological Voices

As Baptists, we have recourse to Jesus, the Bible, and to the principles that have guided believers in the past. In this respect, the Old Testament is generally not analogous to our current situation. Monarchical theocracy has little correlation to a modern situation of a secular government funding a dissenting church.

Three major Old Testament figures take significant roles of civic leadership during times of exile, exploring how God would have them live within alien and generally oppressive cultures. The first of these is Joseph,[23] who rises to the position of vizier in the court of Egypt, a position second only to the pharaoh himself. However, Joseph appears

[22] P. Fiddes, 'A Response to David Carter's Review of *Tracks and Traces*', *Ecclesiology*, 1, no. 3 (2005), 93–100 (p. 96).
[23] Genesis 30–45.

to have assimilated into the Egyptian culture. On that basis, his example might only speak to a church careless of its distinctive voice.

Nehemiah was given the opportunity of leading the Israelites in the return to Jerusalem, overseeing the rebuilding of the walls and rediscovering the books of the law.[24] Yet the story of Nehemiah is of a leader withdrawing people of faith from the alien culture in which they had been embedded. For that reason, it is perhaps less instructive for churches that will remain immersed in the twenty-first-century UK setting while attempting to maintain a distinctive voice.

Perhaps the most helpful Old Testament figure for this study is Daniel. He is subject to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and serves the king with loyalty and ability until the time of the Persian conqueror Cyrus, all the while remaining true to the God of Israel. While in the story Daniel holds a high governmental office in Babylon, he notably refuses to compromise his faith even at grave risk to his safety,[25] and is upheld as a paradigm for remaining faithful in a challenging external environment. The Book of Daniel is complex and we should not resort to facile lessons. Yet Daniel is an active participant in civic life, willing to engage. He is a believer exercising power and responsibility in the alien culture in which he finds himself. However, there are limits to his cooperation with the ruling power, and Daniel chooses to retain his defining values in the public gaze in the face of personal and positional jeopardy.

In the same way, we are not called to withdraw from public engagement for the common good of the communities in which we live. Yet we might ask what the non-negotiable boundaries of our relationship with our host communities are. I suggest that these lines tend to be understood rather than articulated in our churches and may tend to centre on issues of personal morality or politics.

The New Testament is more directly relevant to the case at hand, as this describes the relationship between early Christians and a government inimical to the values of Jesus Christ. It was in this context

[24] See the whole Book of Nehemiah.
[25] Daniel chapter 6 in particular.

that Jesus clearly taught the importance of separate loyalties, not least in terms of finance.[26]

While Paul teaches 'let every person be subject to the governing authorities',[27] this is about the common good that arises from sound and godly civil government, which Christians should support. It does not require churches to be subjected to intrusive state regulation. Peter argues, 'Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority,'[28] but also tells the Jewish leaders, 'We must obey God rather than human beings.'[29]

None of these verses relates directly to the state funding of churches, which was unknown in the first century. However, they do speak to a recognition of God-given but separate roles and to the importance of maintaining the church's distinctive voice in society.

The main difference between the prevailing cultures of New Testament times and our current position in the UK in 2020 is that the Roman government in the first century was hostile to the Christian values espoused by the church, whereas today our charitable status may tend towards churches losing their distinctiveness by being seen only or mainly as charities. The peril to the first Christians was persecution; to us it may be syncretism, leading to the loss both of self-governing independence and a distinctive voice.

We might also take note of the period of Christendom, an approximately 1500-year period of broadly benevolent relationship between Christianity and the state, during which time church and state in the United Kingdom became mutually supporting both politically and financially. However, the focus of this paper is upon Baptist churches, with a theology which has been broadly shaped by the Reformation and by Anabaptist and other dissenting influences. It was in part to avoid the compromises of the historical interdependency of church and state that the first Baptist congregations gathered.

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[26] Matt 22:15–22 and in several parables. All biblical quotations are from the New International Version.
[27] Rom 13:1 following.
[28] 1 Peter 2:13.
[29] Acts 5:29.

I note that other European countries with a largely Protestant heritage continue the direct, intentional state funding of churches, often by means of a church tax, either mandatory or optional. It might be instructive to explore the experience of these churches, for example in Denmark or Germany, and how overt state funding affects their operation and theology.[30]

One aspect of the normative voice of the four voices model is to determine the faith community's orthopraxy. Each of the tax reliefs and exemptions described above is promoted by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, both in general terms on its website and in its expert advice to churches on taxation matters. While all Baptist churches are self-governing in principle, this strong lead by our national body is important in shaping local decisions.

A balanced debate would need to recognise that there are highly respected contemporary Christian voices championing new approaches to the financing of churches and their mission, as well as to the collaboration between church and state for the common good. For example, in *A Future Bigger Than the Past: Catalysing Kingdom Communities*,[31] Samuel Wells makes a strong argument for the renewal of the church by moving away from the traditional models of resourcing congregational life and mission (benefaction and stewardship) towards new approaches, notably commerce. Yet there is no conflict between churches exploring innovative approaches to funding and a call to revisit a potentially inappropriate dependency upon government for multi-annual income.

Finally, an observation. Though serious conflicts between Christian values and state regulation of charities might be rare, there is an enduring risk of the incremental and unexamined erosion of Baptist principles. In this respect, it is helpful to refer to Paul Goodliff, who identifies some examples of unexamined changes in Baptist polity,[32] and

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[30] Francis Messner, ed., *Public Funding of Religions in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2015).

[31] Samuel Wells, *A Future That's Bigger Than the Past: Catalysing Kingdom Communities* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2019), particularly chapter 2, p. 54 ff.

[32] Paul Goodliff explores this further in 'Baptist Church Polity', in *Church Laws and Ecumenism: A New Path for Christian Unity*, ed. by Norman Doe (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 188–207 (especially p. 190).

to Gareth Morgan[33] and Andrew Iwobi,[34] who both explore some of the current issues regarding religion and charitable status in the UK setting.

Conclusion

This paper sets out evidence of an annual dependency by Baptist churches upon state tax reliefs and exemptions to fund their current levels of activity. In the case of relief on manses, this is demonstrated by HMRC policy and practice. The limited survey of thirty churches in the Eastern Baptist Association offers evidence of the scale of Gift Aid. While it might possibly be argued that the Eastern Baptist Association is somehow atypical of the wider membership of BUGB, any differences would be marginal. The estimate of savings through business rate exemption is indicative rather than aiming at pinpoint accuracy and will vary from church to church. However, the basis for the calculation can be proved through reference to published government policy. It would be hard, therefore, to marshal convincing arguments to challenge the contention that Baptist churches benefit significantly from reliance upon exemption from taxes on an annual basis.

We might argue that the enduring financial relationship between state and church in the United Kingdom is harmonious, reflecting society's appreciation of all charitable bodies and religions. However, to accommodate this view would require the revisiting of our espoused and normative Baptist theology which seeks the separation of church and state, even if financially beneficial. The opposite position would state that the church has jeopardised one of its distinctive values by relying upon the benefits that come with charitable status.

I suggest that the least tenable option would be to continue to seek tax-related income on such a scale while maintaining a contrary stance in our declared Baptist theology. I would hope that this would give rise to a crisis of conscience among thinking Baptists.

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[33] G.G. Morgan, 'Churches and Charity Regulation: 1993–2009', *Public Money & Management*, 29, no. 6 (2009), 355–362.

[34] A. Iwobi, 'Out with the Old, in with the New: Religion, Charitable Status and the Charities Act 2006', *Legal Studies*, 29, no. 4 (December 2009), 619–650.

This article draws attention to a worrying conflict between values and practice which needs to be resolved. It may not be possible to do so without revisiting the wisdom of our current charitable status and the extent to which that may compromise our distinctive witness as Baptist Christians. This article aims to be a contribution to that discussion. I am unaware of any published consideration of how Baptist churches might choose to exist without the official charity model. If Baptist churches cannot function in good conscience as charities within the UK regulatory framework, what are they to do? That is an excellent question that deserves further exploration.

Appendix: Gift Aid — an Outline Survey of Thirty Churches

A survey was carried out of the most recently published and independently examined annual accounts of thirty Baptist churches affiliated to the (UK) Eastern Baptist Association. A wide range of size of membership and local demography is represented.

ANALYSIS OF A SAMPLE OF MOST RECENTLY PUBLISHED BAPTIST CHURCH ACCOUNTS — REVIEWED AUTUMN 2020			
Church No	**Annual income**	**Latest tax reclaim**	**Rounded %**
	£	**£**	**%**
1	570 745	40 909	7%
2	408 862	54 956	13%
3	374 531	55 150	15%
4	329 147	39 779	12%
5	308 818	40 451	13%
6	293 689	9857	3%
7	285 343	26 110	9%
8	265 500	14 370	5%
9	251 941	34 921	14%
10	220 881	35 085	16%

11	183 315	31 325	17%
12	180 204	29 500	16%
14	165 414	24 888	15%
15	153 385	13 255	9%
16	150 580	13 611	9%
17	149 564	11 923	8%
18	135 421	15 990	12%
19	115 924	9870	9%
20	109 114	0	0%
21	108 055	10 412	10%
22	75 393	7582	10%
23	42 410	1998	5%
24	42 147	5841	14%
25	41 821	6075	15%
26	40 988	3648	9%
27	39 684	0	0%
28	30 326	2891	10%
29	26 727	3101	12%
30	23 348	800	3%
	5 123 277	**544 298**	**11.23**
			£
Mean annual income for the period			**170 776**
Median annual income for the period			**153 385**
Mean annual tax recovered as percentage			**11.23%**
Range of tax recovered			**0-17%**

'Don't Mess with Texas': Baptist Identity in the Midst of Controversy

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Abstract:
In the 1980s, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) found itself embroiled in a controversy between moderates and inerrantists. It was a struggle for control of the convention, all its infrastructure, and the right to set the course for Southern Baptists, and those affiliated with them, around the world. While the inerrantists eventually won the war on the national stage, things went differently in the Texas Baptist state convention, known as the Baptist General Convention of Texas. This article examines what happened in the Texas Baptist controversy of the 1980s and 1990s and shows how a unique Texas Baptist identity enabled the moderates to do in Texas what could not be done in the national convention: hold their ground and prevent the inerrantists from achieving victory.

Keywords:
Texas; moderates; Baptist identity; controversy

Introduction

A controversy erupted in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in 1979 and continued throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. It was a struggle for control of the convention, all its infrastructure, and the right to set the course for Southern Baptists, and those affiliated with them, around the world. The two belligerents in the conflict were the moderates and the inerrantists.[1] During the initial stages of the

[1] This nomenclature needs elaboration, as each side was known by various names. The moderates often called themselves 'mainstream' or 'traditional' Baptists, while their opponents labelled them as 'liberals', which was meant as an offensive epithet. 'Inerrantists' were so called because of their belief in and emphasis upon the inerrancy of Scripture. Moderates most often referred to them with the pejorative 'fundamentalist'. Inerrantists preferred the name 'conservative' for themselves. This article will not use that name for them, however, as in Texas, the very name 'conservative' was one over which the two sides fought. This article will,

controversy, the focus was on the SBC as a national body, not so much on the smaller state conventions or local associations.[2] However, as it became obvious that the inerrantists were going to win nationally, the state conventions began to be drawn into the fray. In 1988, Paul Pressler, one of the main leaders of the inerrantists, wrote in an open letter to his supporters that 'conservatives have made some real gains' in several states.[3] In that same letter, Pressler disclosed that there was a major roadblock in the way of an inerrantist sweep in state conventions: Texas.

The Baptist state convention in Texas, known as the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) counts over 5000 churches among its constituent members and has a budget in excess of $34 million. There are twelve affiliated colleges and academies, a newspaper, five medical centres, and many other associated ministries. It is a sprawling, resource-rich organisation. All of this combined to make the Texas Baptist convention an unsurprising place of conflict in a contentious moment in Southern Baptist history. This paper will examine what happened in the Texas Baptist controversy of the 1980s and 1990s and show how a unique Texas Baptist identity enabled the moderates to do in Texas what could not be done in the national convention: hold their ground and prevent the inerrantists from achieving victory in the BGCT.

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therefore, refer to the opponents of the moderates as 'inerrantists'. This term is not without its drawbacks, the most notable of which is the fact that some of those who fought for the moderate side held to the inerrancy of Scripture, but it is relatively free from the negative connotations that would be associated with the word 'fundamentalist'.

[2] The name 'Southern Baptist Convention' gives the impression that there is one entity to which all Southern Baptists belong, which is not the case. The Southern Baptist Convention is the national organisation. However, many states have their own convention of churches, and those states that do not are often part of a regional convention. For example, churches from Washington, Oregon, and Idaho have combined to organise the Northwest Baptist Convention. These state and regional conventions are not subsidiaries of the national convention but are each autonomous. While they may partner with the national convention, it is a voluntary partnership, and a church may partner with a state convention but not the national convention. There are also local associations of churches, which are also autonomous. Thus, to win the national organisation does not necessarily mean winning any of the state conventions or local associations. Those battles would have to be fought separately.

[3] Paul Pressler, 'Open Letter', 8 January 1988, author's personal collection.

Summary of the Southern Baptist Controversy

The causes and characters of the controversy have been covered in several books;[4] however, a brief rehearsal of the key players and events will be helpful. The controversy itself began as a ten-year plan on the part of inerrantists to gain positions of power within the SBC so that they might implement their preferred policies, procedures, and vision within the convention. The formulation of the plan is typically attributed to two men from Texas, Paige Patterson, who was, at the time, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies (now Criswell College) in Dallas, Texas and Paul Pressler, a judge in Houston, Texas. Patterson summarised their plan as follows:

> First, we located all the conservatives [e.g. inerrantists] we could. Second, we needed to counteract the one-sided information put out by the state Baptist newspapers. We started our own, the *Southern Baptist Advocate*. Third, we agreed to elect a solid conservative president. His appointive powers determine who goes on the boards and agencies.[5]

For those unfamiliar with SBC polity, though the convention is technically led by individual Baptists, called messengers, boards and agencies wield significant authority in determining the course of the denomination.

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[4] Accounts of the conflict from the inerrantist side include: James Hefley, *The Truth in Crisis*, 6 vols (Hannibal, MO: Hannibal Books, 1986–1991); Paige Patterson, *Anatomy of a Reformation*, 2nd edn (Fort Worth, TX: Seminary Hill Press, 2004); Paul Pressler, *A Hill on Which to Die: One Southern Baptist's Journey* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998); Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2000). Moderate accounts include: Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religion Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Grady Cothen, *What Happened to the Southern Baptist Convention? A Memoir of the Controversy*, 2nd edn (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 1993); Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2003); Bill Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990); Cecil Sherman, *By My Own Reckoning* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2008); Walter Shurden, ed., *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1994); Walter Shurden and Randy Shepley, eds, *Going for the Jugular: A Documentary History of the SBC Holy War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996).

[5] Quoted in Sidney Blumenthal, 'The Righteous Empire', *The New Republic*, 191, no. 16 (October 1984), 18–24 (p. 19).

The short version of SBC history since 1979 is that the inerrantists won. That year they elected as president of the convention, Adrian Rogers, a pastor from Memphis and reliable inerrantist, and the SBC has never again had a non-inerrantist-aligned president. The moderates launched counter-campaigns in an attempt to get one of their own elected to the presidency, but they repeatedly failed. By the end of 1990, most moderates realised that they had lost.[6] Many left for the newly-formed Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, while others moved to the mainline American Baptist Churches or other Baptist and non-denominational groups.

Texas Baptist Identity

As indicated by the letter from Pressler mentioned in the introduction above, it was no later than 1988 that attention began to shift to the state conventions. If the national controversy can be understood either as a surprise resurgence or takeover, the controversy in Texas should be understood as a deliberate defensive manoeuvre, with the moderates being able to defend their positions of power more successfully than they were able to do so on the national scene. They were able to accomplish this by using particular aspects of Texas Baptist identity to prevent the inerrantist talking points and tactics from taking root in Texas soil.

Walter Shurden popularised the concept of regional Baptist identities when he traced what he understood as the four traditions that constituted what he called 'the Southern Baptist synthesis'.[7] These traditions are the Charleston tradition, the Sandy Creek tradition, the Georgia tradition, and the Tennessee tradition. Each tradition made a unique contribution to the Southern Baptist heritage: Charleston

[6] That year, Daniel Vestal, the moderate candidate, faced off against Morris Chapman, the inerrantist candidate. The moderates hoped that Vestal would be able to best Chapman and give hope that the moderate voice would still be heard. Chapman's resounding victory signalled to the moderates that they had finally lost the battle for the SBC.

[7] Walter B. Shurden, 'The Southern Baptist Synthesis: Is It Cracking?' Carver-Barnes Lectures, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1980–81, p. 5. These lectures were published in Walter B. Shurden, 'The Southern Baptist Synthesis: Is It Cracking?', *Baptist History and Heritage*, 16, no. 2 (April 1981), 2–11. The original lectures will be cited henceforth.

brought order, Sandy Creek taught Southern Baptists ardour, Georgia championed denominational cooperation, and Tennessee gave Southern Baptists a sense of honour.[8]

The recognition of a unique Texas Baptist identity in addition to Shurden's four traditions was given shape and a definition by Leon McBeth.[9] McBeth describes the Texas tradition as being distinguished by 'intense conservatism, fervent evangelism, and a spirit of independence'.[10] These are, of course, not the only aspects, nor should it be understood to say that they are not present in other Baptists; rather, it is to contend, with McBeth, that 'these seem to assume a prominence and intensity' among Texas Baptists that makes them worthy of emphasis.[11]

More to the point, it is these three aspects of Texas Baptist identity that enabled the moderates in the state to keep the inerrantists from what would have looked like a sure victory in a state where the deck would seem to have been stacked well in favour of inerrantists. These apparent odds for victory included the fact that the two chief architects of the inerrantist takeover were Texans who were still based in Texas. One of the other main leaders of the inerrantists, W. A. Criswell, was a well-known pastor of a large church in Dallas, Texas.

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[8] Shurden, 'Southern Baptist Synthesis', pp. 5–8.

[9] Grady Cothen accepted McBeth's Texas tradition as a suitable addition to Shurden's previous four (Grady Cothen, *Whatever Happened to the Southern Baptist Convention? A Memoir of the Controversy* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 1993), pp. 50–51). McBeth was not the first to suggest a fifth tradition informing Southern Baptists. McBeth himself says that Albert McClellan first suggested it (Harry Leon McBeth, 'The Texas Tradition: A Study in Baptist Regionalism (Part 1)', *Baptist History and Heritage*, 26, no. 1 (January 1991), 37–47 (p. 38)). Robert D. Dale and John Loftis both made similar proposals. See Robert D. Dale, 'An Identity Crisis: Southern Baptists Search for Heroic Leaders', *Faith and Mission*, 1, no. 2 (Spring 1984), 36–47 (p. 40); and John Franklin Loftis, 'Factors in Southern Baptist Identity as Reflected by Ministerial Role Models, 1750-1925', (doctoral dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987), p. 214.

[10] Harry Leon McBeth, 'The Texas Tradition: A Study in Baptist Regionalism (Part 2)', *Baptist History and Heritage*, 26, no. 1 (January 1991), 48–57 (p. 48). McBeth anchors the Texas tradition in Texas Baptist history, heroes, and institutions. He singles out Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary as the Texas tradition's 'major institutional expression' and the *Baptist Standard* as 'a major force both in creating and sustaining that tradition'. He cites 'B. H. Carroll as the primary architect of the new tradition, L. R. Scarborough as its most fervent evangelist, and George W. Truett as its primary pastoral role model' (McBeth, 'Texas Tradition (Part 1)', p. 38).

[11] McBeth, 'Texas Tradition (Part 2)', p. 48.

The 1979 SBC meeting that elected the first inerrantist president Adrian Rogers was held in Houston, Texas; another pivotal meeting, in 1988, at which the SBC passed the infamous 'Priesthood of the Believer' resolution,[12] was held in San Antonio, Texas. Finally, one of the features of McBeth's Texas tradition is 'intense conservatism'. That would appear to give the inerrantists, who so often claimed the mantle of true conservatism, a significant built-in advantage. However, the inerrantists would lose the battle for the BGCT, and lose so badly that they left the convention to form their own, the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC).[13]

McBeth's aspects of the Texas tradition will now be used as a framework for understanding the moderate victory.

Texas Baptist Identity in Conflict: Intense Conservatism

The intense conservatism that appeared to give the inerrantists an advantage actually turned into a strength for the moderates.[14] On the national stage, the inerrantists were successful in vindicating the label 'conservative' as synonymous with 'biblical'. Anything that was deemed not conservative, or not sufficiently conservative was, by their

[12] The resolution proved controversial among the moderates, as they claimed that it served to exalt the authority of the pastor, an inerrantist emphasis, at the expense of the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer, a moderate emphasis. The day after the resolution passed, W. Randall Lolley, former president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, led a group of moderate messengers out of the convention centre and to the Alamo, where they wrote 'heresy' on their ballots and proceeded to tear them up (Toby Druin, 'Fundamental-Conservatives Claim 10th Win', *Baptist Standard,* 22 June 1988, p. 3).

[13] The new convention had roots in two inerrantist advocacy organisations: the Southern Baptists of Texas and Baptists with a Mission, which, even before their merger, worked together to 'coordinate things that we want to do so that we are all singing from the same sheet of music and heading in the same direction' (Ted Tedder and Miles Seaborn, 'Open Letter to Pastors', 30 June 1995, author's personal collection). In 2019, the SBTC counted over 2700 churches as affiliates of its organisation, though many of those are 'dually-aligned' with both the SBTC and the BGCT.

[14] Though written for a different context (i.e. a study of the relationship of Texas Baptists to the religious right), Blake Ellis expressed a similar idea: 'To argue against such a move, Texas Baptists employed the same conservative theology as the national leadership but emphasized different aspects of it.' (Blake A. Ellis, 'An Alternative Politics: Texas Baptists and the Rise of the Christian Right, 1975-1985', *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 112, no. 4 (April 2009), 361–386 (pp. 363–64).

definition, not biblical. Opponents were painted as 'liberal' (i.e. non-conservative) as a way to silence them.

Texas Baptists, however, almost all believed that they were conservative, such that it proved exceedingly difficult to portray anyone as non-conservative. Jerold McBride, president of the BGCT from 1994 to 1996 and the favoured candidate of the moderate advocacy group Texas Baptists Committed (TBC), said, upon his election, 'I don't ever want to be considered anything other than a theological conservative.'[15] In the 1980s and 1990s, the *Baptist Standard* had a circulation in the hundreds of thousands and so exercised tremendous influence among Texas Baptists. That publication refused to cede the label 'conservative' to the inerrantists, referring not to conservatives/moderates or fundamentalists/moderates, but to 'fundamental-conservative' and 'moderate-conservative'. Referring to the 1988 SBC meeting in San Antonio, Presnall H. Wood, the editor of the *Baptist Standard*, summed up the issue: 'The convention was deeply and almost equally divided between two brands of conservatives — the fundamental-conservatives and the moderate-conservatives.'[16]

Charles Wade, leading Texas moderate and pastor of the First Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas, wrote that 'they have said that we don't believe the Bible, but we do. They have said we are liberals! But we are the true conservatives!'[17] This was echoed by Maston Courtney, a layman who was involved in the moderate cause, who said, "We have been blessed to be – and remain – old-time Southern Baptists – mainstream theologically conservative Baptists.'[18] Courtney went on to make a distinction between his brand of mainstream conservatism and

[15] Quoted in Ken Camp, 'Texas Baptists Reject Defunding of Baylor; Elect McBride President', *Baptist Press*, 93, no. 181 (26 October 1993), p. 3.

[16] Presnall H. Wood, 'San Antonio SBC Shows Need of Revival', *Baptist Standard*, 22 June 1988, p. 6. In the same issue, Toby Druin, associate editor for the paper, offered his own summary of the 1988 meeting: 'True to their goal, fundamental-conservatives rolled to their 10th consecutive victory in the Southern Baptist Convention sweepstakes' (Toby Druin, 'Fundamental-Conservatives Claim 10th Win', *Baptist Standard,* 22 June 1988, p. 3).

[17] Charles Wade, 'Don't Mess with Texas!' Undated, but written after the release of the 'Peace Report' in 1987, author's personal collection.

[18] Maston Courtney, 'Who We Are and Why We Are Here', Southwest Park Baptist Church, Abilene, Texas, 20 November 1986, John F. Baugh Papers, The Texas Collection, Baylor University. Formatting in original.

that of his opponents: 'As conservative mainstream Texas Baptists we are in serious disagreement with our fundamentalist brothers.'[19]

Perhaps the clearest moderate claim on the name conservative came from Charlie McLaughlin writing in the Texas Baptists Committed newsletter: 'There is a word that describes the core values of Texas Baptists Committed. The term is "Conservative." It has been hijacked and I want it back. For years the fundamentalists have claimed the term "conservative" for themselves.'[20] Then McLaughlin referred to a story from the *Dallas Morning News*, which quoted inerrantist leader Rick Scarborough, who said, 'Conservatives can't win here.' The story went on to quote the rebuttal of moderate David Currie: 'They're not conservatives. They're fundamentalists. The conservatives win here every year.'[21]

Each of these statements are indicative of the way that moderates claimed the 'conservative' label for themselves. On the national stage, the inerrantists were able to define and promote conservativism in such a way as to silence opponents. In Texas, however, the moderates turned that to their advantage, using the established identity of Texas Baptists as 'intense conservatives' to rob the inerrantists of what had been a useful rhetorical tool.

Texas Baptist Identity in Conflict: The Spirit of Independence

The independence of Texans goes back into its history as a part of Mexico, from which they seceded in 1836, producing their own 'Declaration of Independence', modelled on the earlier 'Declaration' made by the United States. The spirit of independence shared by Texas Baptists made it easy for the moderates to portray the inerrantists as an outside force bent on taking over Texas Baptist institutions and dictating to Texas Baptists how to run their convention.

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[19] Courtney, 'Who We Are and Why We Are Here'.

[20] Charlie McLaughlin, 'True Conservatives', *Texas Baptists Committed,* February 1997, p. 4.

[21] McLaughlin, 'True Conservatives', p. 4. The Scarborough quote is taken from Christine Wicker, 'Moderate Retains Control of Texas Baptist Group', *Dallas Morning News*, 12 November 1996, p. 18A.

Independence and religion are inextricably tied together in the Texan mindset, as evidenced in the Texas 'Declaration of Independence'. In making their case for declaring themselves a 'free, Sovereign, and independent republic',[22] the Texans list the grievances they had with the Mexican government which led them to take such drastic steps. One of the grievances both reveals and would come to shape Texas religious life. It states, '[The Mexican government] denies us the right of worshipping the Almighty according to the dictates of our own conscience, by the support of a national religion, calculated to promote the temporal interest of its human functionaries, rather than the glory of the true and living God.'[23] In a Baptist vein, the Texans appeal to the liberty of the conscience, saying, in essence, that it had been violated by the Mexican government. The sacred nature of the conscience, and a deep unwillingness to see it violated, would come to mark the identity of both Texans in general and Texas Baptists in particular, thus making way for McBeth's 'spirit of independence' and another prong in the moderates' defence against the inerrantists.

The moderates appealed to the Texas Baptists' spirit of independence in at least two ways. First, they used it to explain their denominational polity. In the 1990s, the BGCT published a series of articles under the heading 'Because You Asked…'. In one of the articles, they dealt with the issue of the relationship of the BGCT to other Baptist bodies. Several questions were put forward and answered, and the answers given state plainly the independent conviction of the Texas Baptists. For example, in answer to the question, 'Is each Baptist entity autonomous and free from the control of any other?' they write, 'Absolutely. The local church is the basic unit of Baptist life, and each church is autonomous. That means self governing. Only Christ is Lord of the church. No other Baptist body has the right to dictate to a church what to believe or how to function.' In answer to the question, 'Does the model of county, state and federal government apply to Baptist organizational life?' they answer, unequivocally, 'No, not at all. The Baptist General Convention of Texas and the SBC are autonomous,

[22] 'The Texas Declaration of Independence', in *The U.S.-Mexican War: A Binational Reader*, ed. by Christopher Conway (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2010), pp. 16–19 (p. 19).
[23] 'The Texas Declaration of Independence', p. 18.

independent Baptist bodies. Neither has authority over the other […] It is also incorrect to speak of levels of Baptist organized life. Beyond the local church, they are all on the same level, that is equal and independent.' Finally, in answer to the question, 'What is the relationship of Baptist bodies to each other then?' they write, 'Two words sum up what it ought to be: voluntary cooperation.'[24]

Jerold McBride, then-president of the BGCT, put the matter more bluntly and memorably during a news conference, saying, 'Texas Baptists are not a farm team of the Southern Baptist Convention. The SBC doesn't make Texas Baptists possible. Texas Baptists make the SBC possible.'[25] Whether in a formal way through BGCT press releases or in more informal ways coming from denominational leaders, the moderates used the independence of Texas Baptists in order to explain the inner workings of denominational polity.

Whereas the first use of independence in their rhetoric had to do with who Texas Baptists were, and was, thus, more positive in nature, their second use of independence had to do with what their opponents might do if left unchecked. It was, therefore, more negative in tone and stoked the fear that Texas Baptists had of outside interference.

An issue of the *Baptist Standard*, written prior to the 1980 SBC meeting, carried repeated warnings of an outside group intent on taking control. Referring to the political manoeuvring of the previous year, editor Presnall Wood writes that 'the same group that was meeting before the convention last year is still having meetings and possibly plans to do so for the next 10 years'.[26] Inerrantist leaders had, by that time, become open about their plans, and Wood wanted Texas Baptists

[24] Baptist General Convention of Texas: Office of Communication, 'Because You Asked…What is the relationship of the Baptist General Convention of Texas to other Baptist bodies?' Press Release, author's personal collection.

[25] Quoted in Ken Camp, 'Texas Baptists Reject Defunding of Baylor; Elect McBride President', *Baptist Press*, 93, no. 181 (26 October 1993), p. 3. Charles Wade made a similar comment after his election as President of the BGCT in 1997: 'We have never been a franchise for the SBC' (quoted in Christine Wicker, 'Moderate Retains Control of Texas Baptist Group', *Dallas Morning News*, 12 November 1996, p. 18A).

[26] Presnall H. Wood, 'Concerns about 'Concerned' Organization', *Baptist Standard*, 23 April 1980, p. 6.

to know what they were and how it might impact the convention as a whole, writing,

> They plan to help elect the president of the Southern Baptist Convention for at least four consecutive years, maybe 10, and thus control appointment of the committee on committees. That committee could in turn appoint persons of like mind, and possibly control the boards and agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention in a 10 year period […] It smacks of a take-over.[27]

Charles Wade, in 1987, took the same rhetoric and applied it to the Texans specifically, writing, 'Paige Patterson has said, "We must now move beyond the SBC to change the direction of the Texas Baptist Convention." And I say, "Paige, don't mess with Texas".'[28] Even though Patterson himself was a Texan, and the son of a former executive secretary of the BGCT, Wade was able to portray him as an outsider intent on coming into Texas to take over the BGCT. To independent-minded Texans, there was an almost reflexive reaction against ideas of a takeover.

In a letter to William Pinson, then the executive director of the BGCT, John Baugh stated what he felt to be the specific threats to Texas Baptist independence posed by the inerrantists. The threats Baugh outlined are as numerous as they are far-reaching, and they show how much Texas Baptists feared the violation of their independence:

> I believe that Fundamentalism's principal designs to take over state conventions, particularly the BGCT, are to obtain: assurance of a continuous major flow of money to Nashville, control of Evangelism Conference platforms in order to attempt re-establishment of unmerited credibility, seizure of the *Baptist Standard*, again to rebuild failed credibility, control of state convention colleges and university, seizure of the Baptist Foundation of Texas, creation of bloc voting in secular politics and ultimately, the absolute arbitrary control of pension monies to be paid to retired pastors and other denominational employees.[29]

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Charles Wade, 'Don't Mess with Texas!' 'Don't Mess with Texas' comes from an anti-littering advertising campaign in the 1980s. Also, it is not certain when or where Patterson said this, though it is consistent with things he is known to have said. See Paige Patterson, 'Conversations with Evangelicals', Interview, *Texas Baptist*, 2, no. 4 (July 1995), p. 4.

[29] John F. Baugh, 'Letter to William M. Pinson', 19 October 1993, John F. Baugh Papers, The Texas Collection, Baylor University. Copied into the letter were Milton Cunningham, Director of Denominational Affairs for Baylor University; Richard Maples, pastor of the First Baptist

Whether Baugh was correct is immaterial. His letter reveals the fears that Texas Baptists had of inerrantists taking control of the convention.

The moderates received a considerable boost for their rhetoric invoking independence when, in 1994, the trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary fired Russell Dilday as president. It would be difficult to overstate how controversial this was in the state of Texas. The connection between Texas Baptists and Southwestern runs deep. Even though Southwestern had long been under the control of the national convention and not the BGCT, many Texas Baptists understood the school as their seminary. When a group of perceived outsiders imposed their will on the seminary, against the wishes of many, if not most, Texas Baptists, the reaction was swift and overwhelmingly negative, with many moderates believing that the firing of Dilday vindicated their warnings and rhetoric.

John Baugh wrote in a letter to Brian Harbour, a one-time chairman of the Executive Board of the BGCT, 'The March 9 firing of Dr. Russell Dilday was viewed as high drama throughout the nation. Dr. Dilday's commitment to conservative theology was unquestioned […] Some of the Fundamentalist-appointed trustees lied to Dr. Dilday […] lied about Dr. Dilday […] misused Dr. Dilday in ways abhorrent to all Christians.'[30] Baugh then asks, ominously, 'Is the Fundamentalist phalanx to be allowed use of its armor to destroy the BGCT? Will the pendulum be melted down to form stronger and longer lances? Will [the inerrantists] subject Texas Baptists to unopposed Fundamentalist "purification"?'[31] Texas Baptists Committed warned,

> Texas has more than 5,500 churches and missions. Most of the pastors are trained by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Over the next twenty years, as those students are trained by a fundamentalist faculty, which

Church in Bryan, Texas, and a key moderate leader; Dewey Presley, an influential layman; Levi Price, chair of the Executive Board of the BGCT; James Semple, director of the State Missions Commission of the BGCT; and Bailey Stone, director of the Evangelism Division of the BGCT. Baugh was a wealthy and passionate businessman who fought for the moderate side and whose influence in the Baptist world has not been fully appreciated.

[30] John F. Baugh, 'Letter to Brian L. Harbour', 22 February 1995, John F. Baugh Papers, The Texas Collection, Baylor University.

[31] John F. Baugh, 'Letter to Brian L. Harbour', 22 February 1995.

> Southwestern will become, and then go to Texas churches, our state could turn fundamentalist. This must not happen.[32]

TBC went on to urge Texas Baptists to

> make a strong commitment to never allow a fundamentalist takeover of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Texas Baptists, if they were a denomination by themselves would be the fourth largest denomination in the United States. The budget of the BGCT and its related institutions (hospitals, universities, children's homes, etc.) is larger than the budget of the SBC and its related institutions. God has blessed Texas Baptists and we must be good stewards of all he has given Texas Baptists. Texas Baptists stood and kept [the fundamentalist] J. Frank Norris from destroying our state convention once, and we must, with integrity under the grace of God, stand against his spiritual children today. WE MUST NEVER ALLOW THIS STATE CONVENTION TO TURN FROM OUR BAPTIST HERITAGE![33]

The independence of Texas Baptists and the moderate's ability to use the conflict to explain independent denominational polity as well as portray the inerrantists as invaders combined to severely weaken the inerrantist chances at victory in the BGCT.

Texas Baptist Identity in Conflict: Fervent Evangelism

The fervent evangelism of Texas Baptists served both as the glue which held the convention together during the controversy as well as a reason for the moderates to urge Texas Baptists to ignore or dismiss the

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[32] Anon., 'Controlling Our Destiny as Texas Baptists', *Texas Baptists Committed*, March 1994, p. 10.

[33] Anon., 'Ways to Respond to Russell Dilday's Firing', *Texas Baptists Committed*, March 1994, p. 3. Capitals in copy. J. Frank Norris was an early-twentieth-century preacher who exercised considerable influence among Texas Baptists, both those within the BGCT and those who were more independent-minded. In the 1920s, he began to offer stinging criticisms of Baylor University, a crown jewel of Texas Baptist higher education, and Southern Baptist initiatives (e.g. the Seventy-Five Million Campaign), becoming a thorn in the side of the BGCT. The memory of Norris lived long in the minds of Texas Baptists, and tying inerrantists to Norris was a favourite tactic of the moderates, from the grassroots level all the way to the leadership. In 1984, after the SBC meeting in Kansas City, Missouri, a letter to the editor invoked Norris, saying, 'The ghost of J. Frank Norris walked Bartle Hall in Kansas City, June 12-14, chuckling to himself, "We've won it all"' (D. R. Phillips, 'Letter to the Editor', *Baptist Standard*, 27 June 1984, p. 2). Texas Baptists Committed spoke of their inerrantist opponents as 'the spiritual children of J. Frank Norris' (Anon., 'L. R. Scarborough: He Set Our Example', *Texas Baptists Committed*, March 1994, p. 11).

inerrantist agenda, as it distracted them from their mission to get the gospel to all people. This mission-based rejection of the inerrantist programme appeared early. In 1980, the *Baptist Standard* ran an opinion piece by C. E. Colton called 'Our Inerrancy Syndrome', in which Colton pleaded for Texans to be less passionate about defending the Bible and more passionate about proclaiming it: 'It seems to me that God would be more pleased with us if we spent more time proclaiming the divinely inspired word of God in its message to a lost, dying world and less time trying to defend it. The Bible does not need defending; it needs proclaiming.'[34]

The commitment to missions and evangelism, like their independence, has deep roots in Texas history and institutions. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas was organised as a training centre for 'soul winners'. The second president of Southwestern, L. R. Scarborough, described the heart of the seminary, 'If the Southwestern Seminary has any phase of its work which is unique, if it gives special emphasis to anything, probably it is in the line of fervent evangelism. The entire administration and teaching force, the whole life of the institution, is set to the high notes of soul winning.'[35] Southwestern trained a great number of Texas Baptist pastors over the ensuing decades; through them, they spread their soul-winning convictions to many Texas Baptist churches.

This mission emphasis carried the Texas Baptists through the conflict. Toby Druin wrote in the *Baptist Standard*,

> Shunning controversy in favor of the things Baptists traditionally have done best – missions and evangelism – Texas Baptists in their 99th annual meeting here last week enthusiastically endorsed a plan to build 2,000 new churches in the state over the next five years and win the seven million lost people in it to Jesus Christ.[36]

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[34] C. E. Colton, 'Our Inerrancy Syndrome', *Baptist Standard*, 2 January 1980, p. 11.

[35] Cited in Glenn Thomas Carson, 'L. R. Scarborough and the Southwestern Dream', *The Journal of Texas Baptist History*, 14 (1994), 70–86 (p. 76). Carson describes the 'Southwestern Dream': 'For both Carroll and Scarborough, the heart of the "Southwestern Dream" was evangelism' (Carson, 'L. R. Scarborough and the Southwestern Dream', p. 70).

[36] Toby Druin, 'Mission Texas Gets an Enthusiastic "Yes!"', *Baptist Standard,* 7 November 1984, p. 3.

Presnall Wood wrote, 'The Oct. 30–Nov. 1 state convention in Dallas, attended by an almost record 4,075 messengers, chose not to give their time to controversy but to a visionary and ambitious program called Mission Texas.'[37]

Texas Baptists maintained that their chief objective was to engage in missions and evangelise their state and world. The conflict was portrayed by the moderates as a distraction from their main objective. Through this, they were able to convince other Texas Baptists that inerrantist agitation should be ignored.

Conclusion: Why Was It So Effective?

Research into collective identity has been ongoing since the 1970s. While this is not the place to rehearse the whole of that enterprise, some of the insights of the research can help shed light on why the moderate's use of unique aspects of Texas Baptist identity had such a powerful effect on the conflict. In their work on collective and national identity, Ohad David and Daniel Bar-Tal put forward six key features of collective identity: belief in a common fate; perception of differentiation from other groups; coordinated activity of members; sharing beliefs, attitudes, values, and norms; concern about the welfare of the group; and a perceived continuity with the group's past and future.[38] Each of these, in varying degrees, played a part in the moderate's marshalling of Texas Baptist identity to defeat the inerrantists and shows why their arguments had the effect they did.

First, the belief in a common fate is reflected in the rhetoric of takeover. The sentiment was, 'If we do not stop them, then we could

[37] Presnall H. Wood, 'Editorial: Convention Committed to "Larger Issues"', *Baptist Standard*, 7 November 1984, p. 6.

[38] Ohad David and Daniel Bar-Tal, 'A Sociopsychological Conception of Collective Identity: The Case of National Identity as an Example', *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 13, no. 4 (2009), 354–379 (p. 359); cf. Neta Oren and Daniel Bar-Tal, 'Collective Identity and Intractable Conflict', in *Identity Process Theory Identity, Social Action and Social Change*, ed. by Rusi Jaspal and Glynis M. Breakwell (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 222–252 (pp. 223–24). While their research is primarily aimed at understanding national identity, they also use it for other groups, such as ethnic and racial groups within a nation (David and Bar-Tal, 'Collective Identity', p. 363).

lose everything.' Charles Wade used the possibility of dictatorial pastors taking over churches in order to stoke the fear of a takeover in the convention.[39] A letter to the editor of the *Baptist Standard* held out the spectre of a 'Baptist pope' under the leadership of inerrantists.[40] John Baugh believed that the destruction of the BGCT was a possibility if the inerrantists won.[41]

Second, the moderates also used the independence of Texas Baptists to demonstrate the uniqueness of their collective identity and differentiate them from the larger national convention: they were not the SBC, nor were they a farm team of the SBC. They were a unique, autonomous convention that could do things as they saw fit. Billy Ray Parmer wrote in the Texas Baptists Committed newsletter of the inerrantists, who 'want individuals and churches to do things a certain way', and of the moderates, who 'want people and churches to do things the Baptist Way which is voluntary cooperation and local decision making'.[42] Voluntarism was very much tied to independence: cooperation did not form a new organisation in which one party was over against another. Cooperation was always and ever between two independent organisations that remained such.

Third, their sense of coordinated activity was expressed through the long-term commitment to evangelism and missions, the shared activity of which helped define who they were. Since it was a part of their collective identity, any threat to it was a threat to their self-understanding, so the moderate rhetoric in favour of their shared mission proved especially fruitful. A repeated refrain in the *Baptist Standard* was the goodness and desirability of Texas Baptist mission efforts over against the divisiveness of the national convention. Presnall Wood wrote in 1988, 'Increasingly Texas Baptists feel good about Texas Baptist work while feeling uneasy about the arguing in the Southern

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[39] Charles Wade, 'Don't Mess with Texas!'

[40] Joe R. Griffin, 'Letter to the Editor', *Baptist Standard*, 8 August 1979, p. 2.

[41] He referred to this potential outcome in two separate letters to Brian Harbour (John Baugh, Confidential Letter to Brian Harbour, 22 February 1995; John Baugh, 'Comments to the Baptists Distinctives Committee', submitted to Brian Harbour, 7 April 1995, John F. Baugh Papers, The Texas Collection, Baylor University).

[42] Billy Ray Parmer, 'We Are the Middle', *Texas Baptists Committed*, December 1994. The source has no pagination.

Baptist Convention. Texas Baptists must make sure that the division which is evident in the Southern Baptist Convention is not permitted to come into the Texas Baptist convention.'[43]

Fourth, the commonality of beliefs, values, and norms proved crucial for the moderate case. Not only did they win the war to claim 'conservative' for themselves, they also promoted their distinctive beliefs and portrayed the inerrantists as a threat to those beliefs. The autonomy of the local church and the priesthood of the believer were the noteworthy doctrines which the moderates continually upheld as defining characteristics of Texas Baptists. The moderates continually pressed the distinctives of Baptist theology, namely, 'the priesthood of believers, local church autonomy, the separation of church and state, and [belief] in the Bible (without a creed) as the final authority in matters of faith and practice'.[44] In 1994, the BGCT, at the urging of moderate leaders, appointed the Baptist Distinctives Committee, which would research and produce material on the distinctives mentioned above, further cementing their shared understanding of what it means to be Baptist.[45]

Fifth, concern for the welfare of the group was seen in the mobilisation of workers in the common cause of defending the convention, where the moderates proved especially effective at organising individuals for the sake of the whole. They divided the state into zones, and each zone had a leader who would keep track of existing supporters and recruit new ones to attend the annual state convention meeting, so that they might vote and defeat any inerrantist candidates or resolutions.[46] They also sponsored Youth Leadership Camps in order to

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[43] Presnall H. Wood, 'San Antonio SBC Shows Need of Revival', *Baptist Standard*, 22 June 1988, p. 6. He wrote much the same thing two years later when covering the SBC meeting in New Orleans (Presnall H. Wood, 'New Orleans Affirms Direction of Convention', *Baptist Standard* 20 June 1990, p. 6).

[44] Texas Baptists Committed, 'Do You Support the Ministry of the Baptist General Convention of Texas', pamphlet, author's personal collection.

[45] See Dan Martin, 'Enrollment in Texas Baptist Schools Tops 31,000', in *A Texas Baptist History Sourcebook: A Companion to McBeth's Texas Baptists*, ed. by Joseph E. Early, Jr (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2004), pp. 627–29 (pp. 627–28).

[46] In a personal conversation, one former leader among the moderates told me that they were so effective at organising that they would usually know within just a few votes how many votes they would have at any given meeting.

find potential moderate leaders; identified as many churches as possible as being with the moderates, against them, or somewhere in between; and categorised pastors in the state according to their support of the moderate cause. So important was mobilisation that David Currie, leader of Texas Baptists Committed, wrote that if they could have enough votes 'for three or four straight years, [the inerrantists] might become so discouraged that they will give up the fight, as we did at the SBC level. That would bring peace to Texas Baptists.'[47]

Finally, the moderates were more successful in promoting their continuity with the history of Texas Baptists. They were the 'true conservatives', meaning they were the ones who stood in line with people like B. H. Carroll, L. R. Scarborough, and George W. Truett, all heroes of Texas Baptist history.[48] They would even call themselves 'the real Baptists', placing themselves not only in the line of Texas Baptist history but of Baptist history as a whole.[49]

An organisation grounded in its identity is not easily moved. When conflict came to the BGCT, and there was a threat of imminent change to their organisation, the Texas Baptist moderates were effective at informing their constituents of who they were, what they were committed to do, and the threat that those who represented change posed to their organisation. By doing so, it galvanised Texas Baptists as a whole to reject the inerrantist programme in a way that proved to be rare among Southern Baptists.

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[47] David R. Currie, Memo to 'A Very Select Group of Texas Baptists Pastors', 30 January 1996, author's personal collection.

[48] Presnall Wood wrote of an upcoming meeting of the state convention, 'Whatever is done or attempted by the convention will be in the context of the conservative. Conservative is a good word, and Texas Baptists are conservative.' (Presnall H. Wood, 'Eyes of Texas, Southern Baptists Are upon Us', *Baptist Standard,* 22 October 1980, p. 6).

[49] This was a favourite phrase of Texas Baptists Committed after the 1994 state convention. See Anon., 'Local Church Autonomy Wins Big', *Texas Baptists Committed*, December 1994, p. 1; Billy Ray Parmer, 'We Are the Middle', *Texas Baptists Committed*, December 1994, p. 5.

Radical Discipleship in Participation: Spiritual Formation in Baptist Community

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Abstract:
The missional church movement of the last two decades has awakened a vision for both outreach and social engagement through the mobilisation of the church. In Scandinavia this has also generated a focus on the importance of church planting endeavours in all denominations. While this development is positive, there is also a general consensus that the sustainability of churches is contingent upon the spiritual maturity and commitment of their members. Traditional baptistic emphases on mutuality, community, and accountability are being threatened by growing individualism and consumerism within churches today. In this article, I set out to examine core aspects of Anabaptist and Baptist ecclesiology and pneumatology in relationship to their potential for inspiring a re-visioning of the sacramental character of life in Christian community which can contribute to the discipleship of believers and the realisation of the missional calling of the church. When describing the task of discipleship, this article focuses on the web of ecclesiological convictions that are characteristically Baptist. Here I will present core aspects of Baptist ecclesiology that can collectively contribute to the development of a trinitarian and communal approach to discipleship that is founded on a Baptist sacramental view of the believers' church. The scope of this article forbids discussion of the application of these principles in practice but provides insights into historical theological foundations for a baptistic communal approach to discipleship.

Keywords:
Discipleship; covenantal community; Trinitarian ecclesiology; Baptist sacramentalism

Introduction

Scandinavia has seen an increased emphasis on church planting endeavours which have largely been inspired by the missional church

movement of the last two decades.[1] A renewed vision of the missional character and purpose of the church[2] has placed a strong emphasis on creative social engagement and outreach.[3] However, there is also a growing consensus that participation in the *missio Dei* requires a reciprocal emphasis on both the conscientious spiritual nurture of disciples and their mobilisation for their missional task. This became clear at a recent gathering of church leaders at an annual church planting conference in Oslo, Norway, where it was interesting to note that 'discipleship' was the most important concern for most participants. Discussions among participants centred on the means for encouraging personal spiritual growth through traditional disciplines of the faith such as prayer and Bible study. Consequently, the focus was primarily individualistic, and what was absent from the conversation was a consciousness of the role of the entire church community in the discipleship of members.

In this article, I aim to examine core aspects of Anabaptist and Baptist ecclesiology and pneumatology and their potential for inspiring a re-visioning of the role of the church community in discipleship. In doing so, I will explore how the collective practices of the local church

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[1] The concept of 'missional church' had its origins in the Gospel and our Culture Network which was comprised of a group of missiologists from various denominations who were inspired by the writings of Lesslie Newbigin and his observations concerning the church's role and mission in the changing face of western culture. This resulted in the seminal work *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America,* ed. by Darrell L. Guder, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998). This was the first of many works addressing these challenges in the last two decades. This has also inspired the further work of many engaged in ministry and church planting endeavours. In Scandinavia the main church planting organisation has its roots in the D.A.W.N. movement (Discipling A Whole Nation) and has resulted in the training of church planters and annual church planting conferences (Sendt Konferansen, <https://sendtnorge.no/om-sendt-norge> [accessed 29 March 2022]). The ministry of Fresh Expressions from the UK (<https://freshexpressions.org.uk> [accessed 29 March 2022]) has also been a source of inspiration for church planters in Scandinavia.

[2] Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006).

[3] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003).

are sacramental in nature[4] because they are the embodiment of the participation of the church in the life of the triune God and are instrumental in the *missio Dei* as the church lives and serves within the world. A helpful definition of sacraments is provided by Anthony R. Cross, who describes them as 'the Word of God in action which must be responded to in the act of participating. Sacraments are, quite simply, means of grace.'[5] Therefore, sacramental practices can be understood as embodied expressions of life in Christian community, which are at once both redemptive and transformational. At the same time, while infused by the life of the Spirit at work, they come to expression in the realm of human communities of faith that live in a consciousness of the hope of the eschaton, where only then will the completion of the path of discipleship be fully realised.

I first turn to the Anabaptist concept of discipleship, as their theology and practice continues to influence Free Church traditions, including Baptists.

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[4] Baptists have frequently been understood to hold a non-sacramental view of the practices and life of the church. However, extensive research has demonstrated convincingly that Baptists have historically and theologically held sacramental views of not merely baptism and the Lord's Supper but also of the collective ministry of the church, including communal discernment, the study of scripture, preaching, prayer, and the varieties of ministry performed by church members. Baptist sacramentalism finds its basis in Baptist ecclesiology which emphasises that the church is a local (and visible) gathered community of regenerate believers living in fellowship with one another under the Lordship of Christ. Several anthologies describing what has become known as 'Baptist Sacramentalism' have been published within the series *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* in 2003, 2008, and 2020 (*Baptist Sacramentalism: Studies in Baptist History and Thought,* ed. by Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (Vol.1, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003; Vol. 2, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008; Vol. 3, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020)). A sacramental view of believers' baptism was researched by G.R. Beasley-Murray in his work, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1960) but also by other British Baptist theologians such as A. Gilmore (*Christian Baptism*, ed. by Gilmore (London: Lutterworth, 1959)) Neville Clark, and R.E.O. White. More recent contributions have been the research of Stanley K. Fowler in *More that a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), and Anthony R. Cross in *Baptism and the Baptists: Theology and Practice in Twentieth-Century Great Britain* (Carlilse, UK; Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2000) and *Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament: Baptisma Semper Reformandum* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013).

[5] Anthony R. Cross, *Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament*, p. 189.

Anabaptist Views on Discipleship

Harold S. Bender has identified three main features characterising 'the Anabaptist vision' where he identifies 'discipleship' or 'following' (*Nachfolge Christi*) as the most central identifying feature of Christianity for Anabaptists.[6] Sixteenth-century Anabaptists insisted that salvation should be evidenced in a radically transformed mode of life caused by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. The true indication of sincere faith was perceived to be a covenant of discipleship where the life of the believer was fashioned after the teachings and example of Christ. A fundamental realignment of the human will was necessary in order for the will of God to be accomplished in the life of the earnest believer. Anabaptists agreed with Protestants that salvation has its origins in the divine initiative of God when received in faith, but they also insisted that spiritual regeneration must be manifested in visibly righteous lives. They emphasised faith and grace, but were convinced that the grace believers received in faith should be applied and revealed in their conduct and relationships.[7] The grace of God was perceived as a present living power working transformation in the lives of sinners, where obedience to the word of God was an outworking of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the sincere believer. Good works performed by believers were not a means to earn salvation, but rather the result of believers yielding to the power of God at work within them. The 'yielding' or 'abandonment' of human beings to the divine will of God in their obedience is expressed by the word *'Gelassenheit'*.[8] Arnold C. Snyder describes this concept and how it came to expression in practice:

> Anabaptists believed that human beings had to respond to God's call. They had to yield inwardly to the Spirit of God, outwardly to the community and to outward discipline, and finally in the face of a hostile world, believers might have to 'yield' by accepting a martyr's death. The necessary unity

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[6] Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944), pp. 20–21; 26–28.
[7] Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision*, p. 21.
[8] This term is difficult to translate adequately because it lacks a corresponding word in the English language. It has several nuances that when combined together result in the Anabaptist understanding of the word.

> between the inner life of believers and their outer lives of discipleship and community life is seen here again.[9]

Consequently, the second main feature of the Anabaptist vision was voluntary church membership based on true conversion and a commitment to holy living.[10] This was marked and evidenced by their voluntary choice to be baptised as believers. Anabaptist opposition to infant baptism was closely connected to their disavowal of the state church, and their insistence upon voluntary church membership. Another key aspect of the Anabaptist commitment to radical discipleship of believers was the principle of *'Absonderung',* which involved the gathering of true Christians into communities that were separated from worldly society and characterised by true Christian fellowship and love. This love in the fellowship was expressed in the mutual sharing of possessions to meet the needs of others and in their mutual commitment to discipleship.[11] This principle of separation applied to all aspects of life and was key to Anabaptist understanding of the true nature of the church.[12] Unfortunately, this radical approach to discipleship and non-conformity to the world frequently resulted in the violent persecution of Anabaptists, which they perceived to be a natural consequence of their choice to follow Christ. C. Arnold Snyder states,

> The ultimate test of one's renunciation and 'contempt for the world' was the willingness to accept death rather than renounce one's faith and so dishonour one's Lord. The 'baptism of blood' was a daily mortification of the flesh, in preparation for the ultimate sacrifice, if such was needed.[13]

This is why the third feature of the 'Anabaptist vision' for Bender was the willingness to accept violent persecution and martyrdom (the baptism in blood), which also meant the practice of an absolute form of pacifism and non-resistance in the face of violence. Bender sees these three features of 'the Anabaptist vision' as expressions of their

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[9] C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: Revised Student Edition* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1997), p. 152.
[10] Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision*, p. 26.
[11] The original practices of shared economy are still a feature of many Anabaptistic communities of faith today.
[12] Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision*, pp. 27–29.
[13] Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p. 369.

desire to regenerate true Christianity, and to live the life of love which they considered to be the 'fullness of the Christian life ideal'.[14]

Thomas N. Finger organises historic and current Anabaptist thought around 'the New Creation' as an interpretive centre, encompassing three 'inseparable dimensions – personal, communal, and missional'.[15] While Bender emphasises 'discipleship' or 'following' as an interpretive key to Anabaptist theology and practice, Finger claims that Anabaptist concepts of soteriology were transformational in character and intrinsic to their views of the church as the 'New Creation'.[16] Finger cites Balthasar Hubmaier in his description of spiritual regeneration as 'the incorruptible seed, or divine Word that makes us turn green, grow, blossom and bring forth fruit', and concludes that Hubmaier describes justification not in forensic terms, but rather in the language of 'ontological transformation'.[17] Consequently, he presents the concept of 'divinisation' as a central characteristic of early Anabaptist soteriology.[18] For Finger, 'divinisation' is closely linked to believers being reckoned as righteous while still sinners. This can best be understood when considered in an eschatological perspective because in Christ they *already* participate in the new creation's righteousness. He states,

> God reckons us righteous because (on the basis) of this One in whom we participate through grace, not the imperfect righteousness (or content) we derive from it. This notion, however, is really ontological, a participation in renewing divine reality.[19]

Finger further explains that divinisation 'was not transformation of human reality into another kind of reality (divine) but transformation

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[14] Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision*, p. 34.

[15] Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 106.

[16] Thomas N. Finger provides a comprehensive examination of the views of the various groups represented at the time of the radical reformation in the 16th century and a thorough description of differences in origins and influences present at that time.

[17] Alvin Beachy, *The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation* (Nieuwkoop, NL: B. De Graf, 1977), p. 72. Cited by Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, p.114.

[18] Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology,* pp. 51–54. Anabaptist soteriology had varying degrees of emphasis upon divinisation which Finger discusses at length from p. 121ff.

[19] Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, p. 155.

by divine reality of those who remain truly human'.[20] In other words, this does not imply that Anabaptists believed that they achieved a sinless divine state, but that they believed they had received in their salvation the power and grace to live holy lives. This also came to expression in the institution of 'the ban', or 'the rule of Christ' in accordance with Matthew 18:15–18. The earnest desire to restore Christian community to its faithfulness to the New Testament ideal was the motivation for this emphasis upon a corporate and covenantal commitment to mutual admonition and correction.[21] This was a key characteristic of almost all early Anabaptist faith communities[22] and considered to be a constitutive element of the true church.[23] The mutual commitment to communal discipline was also intrinsic to the personal vows expressed in the sacrament of believers' baptism.[24] Franklin H. Littell states,

> The idea of a covenantal relation to God and one's fellows became the foundation of the Anabaptist community and through it came the use of the Ban (spiritual government). The Anabaptists said repeatedly that true baptism was that submission to the divine authority described in 1 Peter 3:18-22, the responsibility of a good conscience toward God. They saw that this couldn't be done easily in this kind of a world, but required brotherly admonition and exhortation, the practice of intentional fellowship.[25]

This is an indication that there were no illusions concerning a sinless state of believers, but there was a strong consciousness of the

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[20] Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, p. 114.

[21] In his description of the communal dimension of 'the New Creation', Finger sees the practice of, and submission to, church discipline as integral to the practice of the sacraments and inherent to the baptismal vow (*A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, pp. 208–233). Kenneth R. Davis ('No Discipline, No Church: An Anabaptist Contribution to the Reformed Tradition', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 13, no. 4 (1982), 43–58 (pp. 43–45)) also describes church discipline or 'the ban' as essential to the 'being' of the church and a core feature of the Swiss Anabaptist's communal practices from the beginning, referring also to the unpublished doctoral dissertation of Jean Runzo which also supports this claim (p. 45; see below).

[22] Jean Runzo, 'Communal Discipline in the Early Anabaptist Communities of Switzerland, South and Central Germany, Austria, and Moravia, 1525–1550' (doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1978), pp. 218–22.

[23] William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1959), p. 120.

[24] Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, p. 209. See also Davis, 'No Discipline, No Church', pp. 43–45.

[25] Franklin Hamlin Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism*, 2nd edn (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), p. 85.

importance of mutual support and accountability in the discipleship of believers within churches. Holy conduct was not merely a personal matter but a concern for the local congregation because there was a strong emphasis on community identity as 'a new creation'.[26]

When considering the communal aspect of discipleship, Finger takes as his starting point believers' baptism, stating,

> Since baptism incorporated one into the church, personal faith was initially, necessarily, and therefore intrinsically actualized in a communal context. Moreover, the communities' continuing call to believers' baptism propelled them into mission and thereby a unique relationship with society.[27]

According to Finger, the communal practices of the church were not merely based on relationships within a church but were rooted in their participation in the life of the triune God:

> The four Anabaptist practices – baptism, Lord's supper, discipline, and economic sharing – were intrinsic to church life not simply because God commanded them. They were essential for whole persons to submit themselves humbly to God and each other, and to be indwelt by God. These actions were not simply human but were rooted in God's triune dynamism. In a sacrament like baptism, the Son was enacting externally through its form, what the Father, as Spirit, was simultaneously performing internally in the baptizand. This triune interaction interwove water with Spirit and baptizands, body and spirit, into the divinizing dynamic. This is why baptism, following Jesus' command employed the triune formula.[28]

Believers' baptism testifies to the new birth, incorporates believers into the new creation, and provides the foundation for communal discernment, discipline, and economic sharing. Believers' baptism was also that which provided the foundation for the church's missionary engagement in the world. As such, it was 'personal, but by no means "individualistic"'.[29] Here the personal, communal, and missional aspects of Anabaptist ecclesiology and discipleship intertwined, revealing contours of an emphasis which provided an

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[26] Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, pp. 157, 209.
[27] Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, p. 158.
[28] Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, p. 166.
[29] Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, p. 169.

approach to discipleship which came to expression in the practices of communities of faith.

Early Baptist Theology of Communal Discipleship

The passion for biblical faithfulness was also the driving force for early Baptists and other Separatist groups in their attempts to define their ecclesiology.[30] The first leaders of those who came to be known as Baptists were John Smyth (1554–1612) and Thomas Helwys (1575–1616). Both Smyth and Helwys emphasised that a true apostolic church was to be constituted through the conscious confession of faith by individuals who freely chose to enter into Christ through believers' baptism and to be comprised of believers living in covenantal relationship to God and to one another. As early as 1607, and while still a separatist, John Smyth wrote in his *Principles and Inferences Concerning the Visible Church* that

> a visible communion of Saincts is of two, three, or more Saincts joyned together by covenant with God & themselves, freely to vse al the holy things of God, according to the word, for their mutual edification, & God's glory. Mat. 18 20 Deut. 29, 12. &c Psal 147, 19 & 149, 6-9. Rev. 1. 6. This visible communion of Saincts is a visible Church. Mat. 18. 20, Act. 1, 15. & 2. 1 41, 42, 46.[31]

He held that the local church had everything that it needed to be defined as a true church and that Christ's authority and ministerial power were afforded to the gathered community of believers. Smyth also argues for this vigorously in his *Paralleles, Censures, Observations* from 1609.[32]

Thomas Helwys wrote in 1611, in his *A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland,*

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[30] C. Douglas Weaver, *In Search of the New Testament Church: The Baptist Story* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), p. 8.
[31] William Thomas Whitley, *The Works of John Smyth, Fellow of Christ's College, 1592-8*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 1, p. 252.
[32] Whitley, *The Works of John Smyth*, 2, pp. 465–66.

> that the church of CHRIST is a company off faithful people 1 Cor. 1.2, Eph. 1.1, separated fro the world by the word & Spirit of GOD. 2 Cor. 6.17, being kint [joined] unto the LORD, & one unto another, by Baptisme. 1 Cor.12.13. Upon their owne confessio of the faith. Act. 8.37 and sinnes. Mat 3:6.[33]

And further in Article 13 he writes the following:

> That everie Church is to receive in all their members by Baptisme vpon the Confession off their faith and sinnes wrought by the preaching off the Gospel, according to the primitive instruction. Matt. 28:19. And practice, Acts 2:41. And therefore Churches constituted after anie other manner, or off anie other persons are not according to CHRISTS Testament.[34]

Believers' baptism marked entrance into the church, and life in regenerate Christian community was to be gathered and centred in their corporate covenant relationship to the triune God and to one another. Marvin Jones describes the consequences of covenantal theology for Thomas Helwys's ecclesiology thus:

> When believers join together in covenanted churches, they have entered the inner life of the Trinity corporately. The Godhead is the source of eternal life for the individual believer and the source of life and headship for the church. […] The pastor, individual officers, and members serve the Lord and one another under the Lordship of Christ in his church.[35]

Here one sees that the trinitarian, covenantal, and communal aspects of Anabaptist discipleship were also key features of early Baptist ecclesiology. Consequently, the shared life in the triune God was not merely the object of their eschatological hope, but a vital and present reality for the church. The strong emphasis on the visible embodiment of faith in the lives of believers previously witnessed in sixteenth-century Anabaptists is also evidenced in Smyth's description of 'the true Churches of Christ' as, 'established of men that did repent & beleeve, and shew their faith by their workes, that were Saints & faithful visiblie: & of these only'.[36]

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[33] Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 120.
[34] Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 120.
[35] Marvin Jones and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *The Beginning of Baptist Ecclesiology : The Foundational Contributions of Thomas Helwys*, Monographs in Baptist History, Vol 6 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017), p. 137.
[36] Whitley, *The Works of John Smyth*, 2, 464.

This also required that they cultivated close fellowship with one another, and that personal oversight of congregants was expected of the elders of the church. This also meant that church discipline was an essential aspect of church life and that there were limitations to the size of churches in order to ensure faithfulness in these practices.[37] The later London Confession of 1644 echoes the original convictions of both Smyth and Helwys, where article XXXIII makes the following statement:

> That Christ hath here on earth a spirituall Kingdome, which is the Church, which He hath purchased and redeemed to Himselfe, as a peculiar inheritance: which Church, as it is visible to us, is a company of visible saints, called & separated from the world, by the Word and Spirit of God, to the visible profession of the faith of the Gospel, being baptized into that faith, and joyned to the Lord, and each other, by mutuall agreement, in the practical enjoyment of the ordinances, commanded by Christ their head and King. 1) 1 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1 2) Rom. 1:1; Acts 26:18; 1 Thes. 1:9; 2 Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:18 3) Acts 2:37 with Acts 10:37 4) Rom. 10:10; Acts 2:42; 20:21; Mat. 18:19, 20; 1 Peter 2:5.[38]

It is also clear from this confession that while early Baptists had a strong Christological understanding of the true nature of the church, they were solidly anchored in a trinitarian belief in God.[39] The practices of worship, teaching and preaching of scripture, prayer, and the ordinances (baptism and the Lord's supper) were essential to church life in addition to spiritual oversight and mutual support, which were key to the nurture and guidance of believers.

Philip E. Thompson also provides us with a renewed consciousness of the role of the church for early Baptists in the spiritual formation of disciples. This is a result of his recognition of the unfortunate legacy of the 'punctiliar, voluntarist, individualist, and conversionist' revivalist soteriology of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Baptists. He seeks to draw upon early Baptist theologians to recover their emphasis upon spiritual formation within the realm of corporate worship in the life of the believing community. He claims that

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[37] Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 121.
[38] Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 165.
[39] See articles I and II (Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p.156).

early Baptists were shaped by Reformed theology in emphasising the absolute ontological and epistemological 'gap' between the Creator and the created, and consequently sought to guard against human presumption and vanity in their knowledge of God.[40] This comes consistently to expression in the first articles of the earliest Baptist confessions of faith. The London Confession of 1644 of Particular Baptists states

> that God as He is himself cannot be comprehended of any but himself, dwelling in that inaccessible light, that no eye can attaine unto, whom never man saw, nor can see; that there is but one God, one Christ, one Spirit, one Faith, one Baptisme, one rule of holinesse and obedience to be observed.[41]

The Standard Confession of General Baptists from 1660 states in Article I that

> We believe and are verily confident that there is but one God the Father of whom are all things, from everlasting to everlasting, glorious, and unwordable in all his attributes.[42]

Consequently, for early Baptists, the revelation of God was not perceived as something occurring within the individual soul but was believed to be mediated primarily within the realm of the communal practices of worship.

The church is the locus of God's presence, Christ indwells the church by the Holy Spirit, and through the Spirit the church is the habitation of God.[43] In addition, he refers to Particular Baptist Benjamin Keach (1640–1704), who emphasised that while personal and family worship was to be encouraged, it was truly within the realm of the corporate worship of the gathered community that the spiritual edification of its members was effectuated through God's presence in their midst. In the section addressing public worship he writes,

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[40] Philip E. Thompson, 'Practicing the Freedom of God: Formation in Early Baptist Life', in *Theology and Lived Christianity*, ed. by David M. Hammond, The Annual Publication of the College Theology Society, vol. 45 (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications/Bayard, 2000), p. 123.

[41] Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 156.

[42] Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 225.

[43] Thompson, 'Practicing the Freedom of God', p. 123 refers to Grantham's *Christianismus Primitivus or Ancient Christian Religion,* Book 2, part 1, chapter 2, section 11.

> Here is most of God's gracious presence (as one observes it), His *effectual presence*: 'In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee' (Ex. 20:24). Here is more of his *intimate presence*: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them' (Matt. 18:20). He walks in the midst of seven golden candlesticks [representing the churches] Rev. 1:13.[44]

The faith formation and edification of the members of the church was also seen to be instrumental in their corporate ministry to the surrounding community as well. This was accomplished through the corporate habits of virtue, which were infused with the grace of the Spirit and effectuated the spiritual transformation of members through the love of Christ. Thompson states,

> As the Church and its members were formed in the image of God's love, Christ, God's redemptive work in and toward the Church became of one piece with God's work beyond the Church. [45]

Covenantal and Trinitarian Ecclesiology

Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes emphasises the historical central influence of covenantal theology when describing key features of early Baptist ecclesiology and identity.[46] According to Fiddes, the mutual covenant within a local congregation is at once both horizontal and vertical, and is founded upon the gracious inclusion of the gathered community within the triune relationship of the Godhead. Fiddes comments,

> As God the Father makes covenant of love eternally with the Son in the fellowship of the Spirit, so simultaneously God makes covenant in history

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[44] Benjamin Keach, *The Glory of a True Church* (Pensacola, FL: Chapel Library, 2018), p. 22, article 10:4. Emphasis original.

[45] Thompson, 'Practicing the Freedom of God', pp. 132–33.

[46] Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Carlisle, Cumbria; Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2003), pp. 21–47.

> with human beings. In one movement of utter self-giving God elects both the divine Son and human children as covenant partners.[47]

Indeed, Fiddes presents a trinitarian model that emphasises *participation* in the life of the Trinity that is based on the concept of perichoresis. He understands the perichoretic 'dance' to be 'movements of relationship' within the Trinity, where one perceives this in terms of the patterns of the dance itself, 'an interweaving of ecstatic movements'.[48] He dismisses any attempts to found a trinitarian theology through drawing an analogy between human and divine 'persons', claiming that 'the closest analogy between the triune God and human existence created in the image of this God is not in persons, but in the *personal relationships* themselves'. Consequently, he insists that we not merely encourage an *imitation* of the life of the Trinity, but rather conceive of life in the Christian community as *participation* in the 'places opened out within the interweaving relationships of God'.[49] The participation of the church in the relational flow of the triune God is founded in the covenantal relationship that God has made with his people and based upon the professed faith of each of its members. Fiddes insists that a local church is then never comprised of an incidental gathering of individuals, but rather a gathered community under the direct rule of Christ.[50] This relationship of the disciples to the triune God is clearly manifested in the sending of the disciples by Jesus in John 20:21–22, where they are also entrusted with the authority inherent to that relationship. According to Fiddes, the movement within the relationships of the Trinity is always a '*movement of sending*' and is therefore both the impetus and source for the mission of the Triune God in the world through his church. He states,

> A triune doctrine of God encourages us to discover our roles as we participate in a God who is always in the movement of sending. The One who sends out the Son eternally form the womb of his being sends the Son

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[47] Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, p. 36.

[48] Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God : A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 72.

[49] Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 49–50.

[50] Paul S. Fiddes, *Participation in God*, pp. 86–88.

> into the world, and Christ after his resurrection from the dead says to his followers: 'as the Father has sent me, so I send you'.[51]

Therefore, the sending of the disciples is the natural extension of the missional 'sending' occurring within the Trinity itself. God the Father sends his Son who sends his Spirit through his Church into the world. Far from being mere imitation, participation in the movement of sending involves the actual representation of Jesus in their acts.[52] As such, the church community is essential to the mission of God in the world, and its communal practices are vital to the formation of disciples who are commissioned by the triune God to do his will. It is precisely within this interweaving of relationships that we can situate the true source of effective power which infuses sacramental practices with salvific grace. If we take Jesus at his word, that 'where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them' (Matt 18:20), it is within the realm of this common life in fellowship with the triune God that the practices of the church emerge and can be described as sacramental.

Sacramental Practices of the Believing Community

When considering what constitutes a Baptist approach to faith formation through the sacramental practices of the church, the starting point must always be the triune God himself. It is the triune God who graciously calls a people to himself and includes them in the outworking of his redemptive plan for all of creation. The practices of the community gain their sacramental effectiveness because they flow from the life of the triune God in their midst. Discipleship then, is not merely an intellectual endeavour, nor primarily accomplished through participation in liturgical practices,[53] but most fundamentally is relational and communal.

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[51] Paul S. Fiddes, *Participation in God*, p. 51.
[52] Paul S. Fiddes, *Participation in God*, p. 51.
[53] The formative role of liturgical practices in the process of discipleship is an emphasis of James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies, 3 vols (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

I would like to suggest that it is this adjustment in perspective concerning the situation of the agency of spiritual power associated with formative practices which needs to occur. It is within the regenerate community of the faithful, in the power of the Spirit as they participate in the life and activity of the triune God in their corporate life, that sacramental practices become means of grace in both incorporating disciples into the Church and providing the spiritual nurture for growth in maturity as disciples. This shift in focus moves the effectiveness of sacramental acts from the acts themselves to the Holy Spirit working within the regenerate believing community enacting these practices. The common life of the Spirit in the community is that which makes sacramental acts constitutive of the church's life and existence, where new members are incorporated into the fellowship through believers' baptism and are sustained and strengthened in their faith in the sharing of the Lord's Supper. At the same time, other practices can indeed be classified as effective sacramental means of grace, such as prayer, the preaching and teaching of scripture, or the gathering of the church meeting as they seek direction under the lordship of Christ in their practice of common discernment. Hospitality, which involves the breaking of bread with 'the other', involves table fellowship which serves to break down the walls of separation between people and invites participation in the life of Christ who is present and presiding at the table.

The challenge for communities of faith today is to realise the sacramental and formative potential found within the tapestry of life's activities and practices, while also carefully taking into consideration the cultural factors that pose challenges to transformative discipleship. Current negative cultural trends can be seen to foster both individualism and isolation, but the need for human relationships and community is fundamental to our human condition. While Western cultures glorify individualism, this stands in diametrical opposition to the collective and communal ethos of church community and serves to foster both a consumerist and isolationist form of Christianity which rarely effectuates transformational discipleship. This is often exaggerated by the reluctance of many to commit themselves as members within church communities and by a lack of stable constancy in service and attendance.

Finding creative ways to strengthen the communal and relational aspect of discipleship can help churches realise the transformational power found within the sphere of covenantal relationships characterised by the grace and unconditional love of the triune God. The grace and love extended and shared is also essential to what it means to be a disciple of Christ engaged in the 'ministry of reconciliation' as missional agents in the world.

Believers' Baptism

The scope of this article does not allow for an extensive discussion of the sacrament of believers' baptism and its relation to discipleship. However, it is essential to emphasise that it is fundamental to all of the other sacramental practices of the church because it is constitutive for the church's life and practices. John E. Colwell states this emphatically in the foreword to Anthony R. Cross's *Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament*:

> The only gospel appeal we find within the New Testament is the appeal to believe the gospel, to repent, and to be baptised, this baptism linked to the promise of the Spirit. A man or a woman is 'in Christ' by virtue of being baptised into Christ. The Church is the body of Christ by virtue of its members being baptised into Christ […] It is baptism that is defining of the Christian. It is baptism that is defining of the Church.[54]

Within that work, Cross describes New Testament baptism as 'faith baptism', and the 'sacrament of faith'.[55] What distinguishes a sacramental view of believers' baptism is that its effectiveness is derived from the faith response of the individual to the gracious self-disclosure of God within the community of the faithful. He argues this convincingly through a thorough examination of New Testament passages referring to water baptism, stating that 'it is clear, therefore, that God's gift to faith and baptism is one, namely salvation in Christ. This is what Peter says in 1 Peter 3:21, "baptism […] now saves you".'[56] The essential link between the conscious faith response of believers to

[54] John Colwell, 'Foreword', in Cross, *Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament*, xiii.
[55] Cross, *Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament*, p. 51.
[56] Cross, *Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament*, p. 60.

the gospel of Christ and baptism into the body of Christ is accompanied by the promise of the Holy Spirit to those who believe. In entering the baptismal waters in faith, believers are incorporated into Christ and the regenerate community of faith — his body. Herein lies the wellspring of the life and ministry of the church as well as of its individual members.

Practising the Sharing of the Lord's Supper

The covenantal unity between believers and the triune God comes to expression and is embodied in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Jesus invites believers to participate in this meal as a commemoration of his death and his sacrifice for our sin. At the same time, believers gather in unity at the table in humble acknowledgement of their common need for his grace and forgiveness. The meal shared is also a shared proclamation of the eschatological hope of the people of God. It is a missional event.[57] Indeed, 'communion expresses the terms on which the Christian community is to live out its life'.[58] It is linked with discipleship. We celebrate communion in the consciousness of his presence at the table through his Spirit who shapes our convictions and ministry. The fellowship that we share at the communion table should naturally be seen as a means of grace in that our participation motivates and enables the inclusion and participation of others. One example of this inclusive nature of communion, reflecting Christ-like life, is the practice of hospitality.

There are few of our practices that embody the Spirit of Christ more than our hospitality, not merely for one another, but even more expansively to include the stranger. In a time of history that is characterised by religious and ethnic strife, where millions of people are driven and displaced from their homes, it has been evident among many European Baptist churches that measures must be taken to attempt to address the needs of migrants in a multitude of ways.[59] Private

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[57] Stephen R. Holmes, *Baptist Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), pp. 146-147.
[58] Nigel G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), p. 109.
[59] See also Peter F. Penner, *Ethnic Churches in Europe: A Baptist Response* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2006).

hospitality has been extended and new friends have been made as Christians have responded to the needs of those alone in their new cultural setting. The church becomes a new family. Communities of faith have experienced that these practices have resulted in the inclusion of new members as they have responded both to the call of the gospel and to the love manifested in the life of Christian communities of faith.

Hospitality can be practised more intentionally within families, where, in continuity with Jewish tradition, gathering at the sabbath table in the home is a central worship practice and place of faith formation. Christian families gather at table with the consciousness of the presence of Christ through his Spirit as we gather in his name. If we envisage hospitality as the 'warp and weft' of family life, it can open doors for spontaneous celebrations of the ordinary as we extend hospitality to others. Hospitality can also manifest itself through programmes initiated by churches that are geared to extend needed support to families and children. Church fellowships can take intentional measures to build relationships *between* families in their midst. Ideally, this can provide a network of significant relationships between children and other adults that can be formative in contributing to their growth as disciples of Christ. However, this can only be born out of a common vision for what the triune God can work within the realm of hospitable sharing. The measures taken for hospitable inclusion must be extended to all people of all ages. Examples of this include both single adults and the elderly. Churches should strive to facilitate inclusion within the many areas of ministry that would benefit from the insight and wisdom of those who have years of life experience as disciples of Christ. At the same time, ministries of mercy and care are means of manifesting the love of Christ in visitation, prayer, and practical assistance for those beyond their years of active ministry.

Conclusion

In raising questions concerning discipleship and faith formation, it is clear that the Baptist theological tradition has a unique communal emphasis which emerges from their vision for the church. The earliest Baptist pioneers provide us with insight into their belief in the

transformational power of the Holy Spirit at work within the regenerate community of faith. In doing so, they also provide us with a foundation for both evaluating and shaping Christian community through the practices that embody and infuse our common life in Christ with his life and presence. The sacramental practices that are formative for discipleship in Christian community derive their effective power through the common participation of the community of faith in the relational life of the triune God. The communal and relational aspects of discipleship are grounded in the covenantal relationship of life and transformational salvific grace in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

The church community lives, moves, and has its being in the realm of covenantal relationships in its corporate relationship to its head. The church is called to embody the life of the Trinity while participating in the unfolding of the eternal eschatological drama that seeks continually and gracefully to include others in the perichoretic dance of the triune God. This is embodied in the sacramental practices of the believing community.

Sacramental Ontology and the Church of Diaspora

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Abstract:
Sacramental theology is experiencing an ongoing renewal among theologians within churches that have been critical of sacramental traditions. Hans Boersma is one important representative of such a sacramental worldview. This article argues that before wholeheartedly accepting sacramental retrieval, it is important to listen to the concerns from theological traditions that have been critical of the sacramental life of established churches. In this article, I present two quite different examples: the sixteenth-century Anabaptist Pilgram Marpeck, and the liberation theologian Leonardo Boff and his ecclesiological thinking in the 1970s and 1980s. Both are highly critical of the focus on priestly actions and the model of Christendom as the context for the sacraments. From these two examples, I argue for a humble ontology that not just celebrates life as a gift, but also accepts creation's ambiguity, and stresses God's eschatological calling in judgement and transformation. A humbler ontology draws attention to those churchly actions that mediate the inbreaking of God's kingdom.

Key words:
Sacramental theology; Pilgram Marpeck; Leonardo Boff; Hans Boersma; ontology of peace

Introduction

Sacramental theology is currently experiencing an ongoing renewal. From being a limited topic in dogmatic treatments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, it has become a key concept in the ecclesial renewal within the Catholic Church and ecumenical dialogues.[1] Increasingly, it is also used to oppose the present exploitation of creation. Not merely bread and wine, and not only the church, but all creation can be a sacrament that mediates God's presence and grace. This sacramental ethos is intimately connected with a renewed interest in Patristic theology and the Orthodox tradition. In a recent book, John

[1] See 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church', I.1, *Documents of Vatican II,* ed. by Austin P. Flannery (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 350.

Chryssavgis claims that, in Orthodox faith, 'the human person is primarily and essentially a liturgical celebrant of this sacramental reality of the world'.[2]

The renewal of sacramental theology is not limited to older theological traditions. Increasingly, it is visible in theologies that have been critical of sacramental traditions such as Anabaptists, Congregationalists, Pentecostals, and Baptists.[3] One outspoken representative of this shift is the evangelical theologian Hans Boersma, until recently the J. I. Packer Professor of Theology at Regent College in Vancouver. He strongly laments that his own evangelical tradition has accepted the modern bifurcation between the natural and the supernatural. In particular, he criticises the tendency to limit God's presence to individual experiences and some miraculous events. With the help of *Nouvelle Théologie* and Orthodox theology, he argues for the retrieval of a sacramental worldview: 'created objects are sacraments that participate in the mystery of the heavenly reality of Jesus Christ.'[4]

Boersma's retrieval of a sacramental worldview has far-reaching consequences for the church and its practices. Ontological convictions and practices are interrelated. He laments that Evangelicals neglect the Eucharist and that they cannot appreciate the importance of the social practices of the church. According to Boersma's critique, in the Evangelical tradition, God's grace is always seen as extrinsic to the material reality of bread and water and ecclesial structures; and such

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[2] John Chryssavgis, *Creation as Sacrament: Reflections on Ecology and Spirituality* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2019), p. 4. Pope Francis writes as follows in his Encyclical Letter 'Laudato Si": 'The Sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life. […] this is especially clear in the spirituality of the Christian East.' (Pope Francis, 'Laudato Si", *The Holy See,* 24 May 2015: <http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html" \l "_ftnref164> [accessed 23 March 2022] (§235).

[3] See for example, Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, eds, *Baptist Sacramentalism: Studies in Baptist History and Thought* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007); Curtis Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014); Daniel Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments: Encountering God at the Altar* (Cleveland: Cherohala Press, 2019); John D. Rempel, *Recapturing an Enchanted World: Ritual and Sacrament in the Free Church Tradition* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020).

[4] See Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), p. 8.

worldly things cannot participate in and mediate the spiritual presence of God. Thus, little room remains for any real sacraments. The church is left with some 'ordinances' that Jesus Christ commanded the church to do in memory of him. According to Boersma, this situation has created a rather barren worship without the mystery of the Eucharist service. For Boersma, a sacrament is no mere sign. It participates in the heavenly reality to which it points, and so it can open human eyes to God's presence in all creation. The water in baptism as well as the bread and wine in the Eucharist connects these sacramental acts with the rest of the material cosmos. With reference to Alexander Schmemann, Boersma states, 'The entire cosmos is meant to serve as a sacrament: a material gift from God in and through which we enter into the joy of his heavenly presence.'[5]

This article explores such interconnections between sacramental practices and ontology in present sacramental theology. I regard the sacramental retrieval as an essential and valuable contribution that can alter historical constraints within Boersma's Evangelicalism as well as among Baptists and in similar movements.[6] As Boersma states, a mere symbolic interpretation of the sacraments has too often accepted the modern bifurcation that reduces the presence of God to a private and spiritual realm. However, before wholeheartedly embracing his and similar sacramental retrievals, I think it is important to remember the concerns from theological traditions that have been critical of the sacramental practices of established churches. The argument I put forward in what follows is that these critical voices imply a more ambiguous understanding of reality which creates a more open and diverse space for human existence. In contrast to a harmonious analogy between heaven and earth in Boersma's Platonist-Christian synthesis, this critical perspective is to a greater extent eschatological and, consequently, indicates other approaches for the renewal of the sacramental practices of the church than those suggested by Boersma.[7]

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[5] Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, p. 9.

[6] See Roland Spjuth, *Creation, Contingency, and Divine Presence in the Theologies of Thomas F. Torrance and Eberhard Jüngel,* Studia Theologica Lundensia 51 (Lund: Lund University Press, 1995).

[7] For Boersma's definition of Platonist-Christian Synthesis, see Boersma, *Heavenly Participation,* pp. 5–7, 33–39.

In this article, I present two quite different examples of such critical voices. First, I describe the sixteenth-century Anabaptist Pilgram Marpeck and, second, the liberation theologian Leonardo Boff and his ecclesiological thinking in the 1970s and 1980s. Although numerous other figures could have served as the focus of this study, I have nevertheless chosen these two theologians as they offer perspectives from within dissimilar theological traditions and contexts. More specifically, whereas one figure stands outside of the dominant church establishment, the other works from within it.[8] Despite this difference, I find it notable that there are striking similarities between these figures regarding both their critiques and their attempts to develop a sacramental interpretation of the church from the bottom up, that is, from the local gathering of believers that stands in tension with the dominant powers at play within society and institutional church (*Christendom*). Namely, both figures understand the church in its true form to be a *diaspora church* scattered in vital communities and thus 'reverting to the minority or diaspora status of the first centuries'.[9] Whatever affiliation a theologian might have, I find it mandatory to listen to the concerns that can be raised from within such an ecclesial perspective.

[8] His two books analysed in this article were written before he was criticised by Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger, leader of *the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith*, in 1984–1985. It is beyond the scope of this article to evaluate the extent to which this critique is fair or whether Boff's ecclesiology has a place within Roman Catholicism. The subsequent silencing of Boff led to his resignation from the priesthood and from the Franciscan order in 1992. For an overview of the Vatican view of Liberation Theology at that time see Peter Hebblethwaite, 'Liberation Theology and the Roman Catholic Church', in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. by Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999*),* pp. 179–198.

[9] George A. Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, ed. by James J. Buckley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 122. Boff uses the concept explicitly. I have not found the notion in Marpeck, but today it is often used to describe Anabaptist ecclesiology. See John H. Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited,* ed. by Michael G. Cartwright (London: SCM, 2003). It is also used by several modern theologians to describe the shift after the Christendom era in the West where the church again lives as a minority in a secular society. See, the famous comments by Karl Rahner in Gerald A. McCool, *A Rahner Reader* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd 1975), pp. 305–09.

The Event of God's Presence in Pilgram Marpeck

In this section I will first describe the Anabaptist leader Pilgram Marpeck's critique of the sacramental practices of the dominating churches and then argue that this critique is interrelated to some basic ontological convictions, even though these convictions are seldom explicated in ontological statements. Marpeck is chosen as he is the author of the longest and most detailed document of the Anabaptists' view of baptism and the Lord's Supper, *The Admonition (Vermanung)*, published in 1542.[10]

Marpeck was born in Rattenberg in approximately 1495 and was a highly qualified engineer and organiser. Perhaps thanks to his skill, he was one of the few first-generation Anabaptist leaders who survived to die a natural death, which for him came in Augsburg in 1556. *The Admonition* is his attempt to unify the divergent Anabaptist movement under one confession. The text also illustrates the main differences between the Anabaptists and other Christian traditions. During his life, Marpeck had several penetrating discussions with different reformers, such as Martin Bucer of Strasbourg, and with radical spiritualists[11] such as Caspar Schwenckfeld. The critique in *The Admonition* rejects at least three aspects within the sacramental practices he confronted: infant baptism, the focus on priestly actions, and the model of Christendom as the context for the sacraments.

The Necessity of Faith

The first and most obvious critique of the existing ecclesial views was Marpeck's rejection of infant baptism. He was convinced that the great tragedy in the history of the church was the loss of a clear connection between baptism and a personal confession of faith. The sacramental life of the medieval church in no way compensated for this loss of faith and discipleship. Children were baptised, and people participated in the Eucharist but without any transformed attitude or commitment. Thus,

[10] Pilgram Marpeck, 'The Admonition of 1542', in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, trans. and ed. by William Klaassen and Walter Klaassen (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1978), pp. 159–302.

[11] Radical spiritualists were one branch within the Radical Reformation who insisted on immediate revelation from the Spirit rather than on mediation through Scripture, sacraments, and priests.

the Anabaptists concluded that the sacraments, such as the rite of baptism and the Lord's Supper, cannot mediate grace independent of a person's conscious response. In this way, they rejected the notion *ex opere operato*. Baptism in water becomes a witness to the Spirit's baptism that has already taken place within the person. Likewise, *The Admonition* severely criticises the popular understanding of the Mass as 'mystified and obscured', a view that considers the bread and wine as 'equal to the being and essence of God'.[12] As other Anabaptists, Marpeck argued that a true Lord's Supper presupposes that the participants *remember* Jesus Christ and are committed to loving one another in the body of Christ.

The obvious risk within the Anabaptist tradition is that it places the sacraments solely within the realm of human *response*. As Boersma argues, Anabaptists often presupposed an ontological barrier separating spirit and matter that limited the sacraments' possibility of expressing a material mediation of grace. However, in contrast to several other Anabaptists, *The Admonition* does not take this path. Marpeck not only opposes Catholics and Magisterial Reformers, who place a high expectation on outer things, but also constantly confronts spiritualists who reject all use of external ceremonies. Already during his stay in Strasbourg, approximately 1528–1532, this standpoint had compelled him to oppose spiritualists who exerted a strong attraction on several radicals who were exasperated with churches fighting each other over external matters such as governance and sacraments.[13]

Marpeck stresses that humans have a direct relationship to the risen Christ through the Spirit. However, in contrast with spiritualists, he also emphasises the humanity of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the incarnation.[14] The incarnation implies that the Spirit continues to appear

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[12] Marpeck, 'The Admonition', p. 262 f.

[13] Marpeck wrote his first booklet against such groups from within his Anabaptist community: 'A Clear Refutation' in Marpeck, *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck,* ed. by Klassen and Klassen, pp. 43–67. 'The Admonition' also opened a long-lasting debate between him and Caspar Schwenckfeld.

[14] For Marpeck's Christological understanding of the sacraments see Neal Blough, 'The Holy Spirit and Discipleship in Pilgram Marpeck's Theology', in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*, ed. by H. Wayne Pipkin (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994), pp. 133–145 and John Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism: A Study in the Christology of Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Dirk Philips* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1993).

in the same historical and material forms as it did during the lifetime of Jesus. The humanity of Christ is extended through the church when it takes the same shape as Christ, that is, when Christians faithfully follow Christ as his disciples. The inner work of the Spirit is always related to the same outer form that it had in the humanity of Jesus. The historical extension of the body of Christ and the presence of the Spirit, the outer and inner, must unite. Mennonite scholar John Rempel summarises the Trinitarian logic of his thought: 'Thus, the church is the humanity of Christ, outwardly doing the ceremonies which the Spirit inwardly fulfills.'[15] Thus, an inward baptism of the Spirit cannot be divorced from its external sign in a water baptism. In contrast to spiritualists, Marpeck argues that salvation is no mere spiritual event but one that happens in history through water, community, and discipleship.

Marpeck claims that the work of the Spirit cannot happen without the outer sign. *The Admonition* therefore states that 'baptism is actually a sacrament; it is something sacred and it entails commitment. Through baptism, a man commits himself or obligates himself with respect to an action of God.'[16] Therefore, even if he, as other Anabaptists, rarely uses the notion sacrament, he concludes with a rather powerful affirmation of the importance of the ordinances. 'Whoever has the truth in his heart, the truth which is pointed to and signified by the external sign, for him it is no sign at all, but rather one essential union [*wesen*] with the inner.'[17] Thus, his critique of infant baptism does not reject the mediation of grace through material reality but rather rejects all form of compulsion in matters of faith. Below I will argue that such stance also has ontological implications.

The Coming Together of the Community

The second aspect of Marpeck's critique is that he strongly objects to traditions that primarily connect the sacraments with priestly actions; instead, his emphasis is on the believers' community. *The Admonition* gives little attention to the role of the priest in the Lord's Supper and

[15] Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, p. 107. However, Marpeck's attempt to hold together inner and outer is precarious, and Rempel shows his difficulties in upholding this Trinitarian logic in his further discussion with Caspar Schwenckfeld, pp. 127–142.
[16] Marpeck, 'The Admonition', p. 181.
[17] Marpeck, 'The Admonition', p. 194.

baptism. John Rempel writes, 'However, it is the congregation which does the action. The Spirit is present in their action, transforming them so that they are reconstituted as the body of Christ.'[18] Similarly, baptism is depicted as a communal event. 'Baptism shall serve this end, that Christ's church, through baptism, be joined together, *formed*, and united in one body of love.'[19] Baptism is described as *the door* or *the entrance* into the church through which a person is included within Christ's body. Communion with Christ is fundamentally connected with the inclusion of people into his fellowship.

Walter Klaassen observes that the Anabaptists in general regarded a discussion about what is happening to the elements 'as totally beside the point, and switched the discussion to a consideration of the presence of Christ in the "body" of believers'.[20] The presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper does not transform the elements but remakes a human community. Thus, Marpeck locates what happens during communion as God and humans coming together as one body. He assumes a profound interrelation between vertical and horizontal reconciliation. Gift and obedience, Spirit and discipleship — these aspects cannot be separated in true communion. Other aspects, including how to properly handle the elements, are secondary.

Marpeck's emphasis on the community rather than on priestly actions also indicates a broader understanding of what can be called sacramental actions. Since *The Admonition* focuses on baptism and the Lord's Supper as actions that the community performs together, it follows that other actions, such as church discipline (the ban) or economic sharing, also become important since these, too, are essential for the constitution of the common life. Loving each other implies that participants admonish and encourage each other and share all things in common.[21] Rempel shows that Marpeck's corpus includes varying lists

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[18] Rampel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, p. 34.

[19] Marpeck, 'The Admonition', p. 294 (emphasis original).

[20] Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1981), p. 190.

[21] Nowhere is the notion of community stronger than in connection with 'the ban' and the authority of 'the key'. The *Schleitheim Confession* of 1527 already testifies to the centrality of the ban. See *The Schleitheim Confession,* trans. and ed. by John H. Yoder (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1977). However, Marpeck strongly objects to those groups who make it mandatory to have

of 'ceremonies', but none of them list only the Lord's Supper and baptism. They also include among other things, Scripture, the ban, rebuke, exhortation, prayer, example, proclamation, and teaching.[22] Jesus Christ is mediated through such external acts of the church. The significance of this broad definition of the actions that mediate God's grace is, according to Rempel, to oppose spiritualistic interpretations. In comparison to the Magisterial Reformation, such a broad understanding highlights rather than devalues the historical and physical mediation of grace. The question is not whether Christ is present in his body; rather, it is *how* and *where* Christ is present.

A broader understanding of the practices of the church can be described as a democratic impulse grounded in the commitment to the priesthood of all believers. Marpeck, in his *Confession* from 1532, states that in 'this house of Christ, there is no lord after the flesh, but only vassals and servants of Christ Jesus, for He Himself served. There is no Christian magistrate except Christ Himself.'[23] Every true believer is the child of God, thus they all 'have authority, so that whatever they loose on earth is loosed and free in heaven, and what they have bound on earth is bound in heaven (Mt 18:18)'.[24] The highest authority of appeal in conflicts is not the priest or the preachers but the whole community coming together in the Spirit. Such a broad understanding of church practices also has important ontological implications, to which I shall return at the end of the article.

An Eschatological Community

The broad sacramental life of the Anabaptists constituted the church as a social reality. The human life of Jesus Christ continues as a *common, outward way of life*; as such, it is a visible body that challenges the surrounding society. For a long time, Europe had been Christian. The visibility of the church was the church buildings and the ministers who

common property, as in the Hutterite tradition. For Marpeck, this is also a kind of external force that violates the logic of God's peaceful incarnation.

[22] Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, p. 98. See for example Marpeck's first work from 1531, 'A Clear Refutation', in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, ed. by Klassen and Klassen, pp. 43–68 (p. 52).

[23] Marpeck, 'Pilgram Marpeck's Confession of 1532', in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, ed. by Klassen and Klassen, pp. 107–157 (p. 149).

[24] Marpeck, 'Pilgram Marpeck's Confession of 1532', p. 112.

were appointed to serve those belonging to this Christian society (the so-called model of Christendom). The revolutionary idea in the Anabaptist tradition was that their practices created a new kind of community — only for those who freely wanted to be part of it.

The Anabaptists interpreted this tension with the surrounding society in eschatological terms. They sought the kingdom of God, and they were convinced that this kingdom stands in tension with the social order that dominates 'the world'. Marpeck states that those belonging to the community of believers, 'must first deny and disown the devil, the world, and all that is a part of it, *as well as die to all vanity, pride, and all lusts of the flesh*'.[25] The Lord's Supper requires an economical sharing with others that goes beyond normal social divisions. Their refusal of all kinds of violence made their ordinary life distinctive. Such acts are not merely secondary consequences from saved individuals. Rather, redemptions happen when the inner work of the Spirit takes form as a new community that already has a share in something of the future that Jesus Christ inaugurated. In a culture of Christendom, the radical witness and practices necessarily created an eschatological tension between the present order and the kingdom of Christ. This conflict with the powers of the world caused Marpeck and other Anabaptists immense suffering. However, according to them, the power of Christ is expressed in suffering. Since the Father of Jesus Christ is humble and not violent, the mediation of grace is always connected with peaceful living.

Ontology of Peace

This short assessment of *The Admonition* shows a remarkable resemblance with much modern sacramental theology in its critique of a reductive and hierarchical interpretation of the sacramental life of the church.[26] Hans Boersma argues, with reference to Henri de Lubac, that the great failure of medieval theology was to forget the close interrelation between the Eucharist and the church. The Eucharist was

[25] Marpeck, 'The Admonition', p. 294 (emphasis original).

[26] For the similarities between Marpeck and the ecclesiology of the Vatican II Council see Neal Blough, 'The Church as Sign or Sacrament: Trinitarian Ecclesiology, Pilgram Marpeck, Vatican II and John Milbank', *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 78 (January 2004), 29–52.

distorted into a miraculous transformation of the elements rather than an event in which the sacramental presence of Christ transformed the people into one body. Boersma claims 'a mystery, in the old sense of the word, is more of an action than a thing'.[27] This definition comes very close to the wording used in *The Admonition*. In this text, 'a true ordinance' is an *event* in which the inner work of the Spirit and the outer work of the body of Christ join in 'one essential union'. Thus, the important question raised in Marpeck's ecclesiology is not whether a practice of the church is a sacrament or not, but what kind of churchly activities mediate God's presence and testify to the kingdom of God.

However, my main argument is not whether Anabaptist tradition offers resources for sacramental retrieval. Anabaptism is deeply ambiguous in this respect.[28] My concern is rather to listen to their critique of the sacramental practices they faced in the Catholic Church and the Magisterial Reformation. One such essential critique is the loss of the connection between sacramental rites, faith, and discipleship. The critique does not have merely obvious ecclesial consequences. In relation to the present sacramental retrieval, it also has ontological implications that call into question the kind of sacramental ontology that Boersma and others celebrate.

According to Stephen B. Boyd, the importance of faith and discipleship corresponds with a deep Anabaptist distrust of all physical forces in matters of faith. The civil power of the sword always stands in contrast to the power of the Spirit.[29] The Anabaptist did not question the need for worldly rulers or the use of the sword in earthly matters. However, in the kingdom of God, 'there is no coercion, but rather voluntary spirit in Christ Jesus our Lord'.[30] In him, God is revealed as

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[27] Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, p. 116. Additionally, compare John Chryssavgis, *Creation as Sacrament*, p. 86.

[28] However, Thomas N. Finger claims that in 'the most basic sense Anabaptist communities are deeply sacramental […] Historical Anabaptists envisioned the church itself much as a sacrament' (*A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), p. 253).

[29] See Stephen B. Boyd, *Pilgram Marpeck: His Life and Social Theology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 159. For Marpeck, this also implied an internal critique of churchly coercion through legalistic control.

[30] Marpeck, 'Pilgram Marpeck's Confession of 1532', p. 112 f.

humble and peaceful, not as a violent force that coerces people into obedience. The church is called to continue Christ's humble way of being present to the world. Thus, redemption must be presented as a free offer to humans who have real independence to accept or reject this divine offer in, for example, baptism.

Rather than seeing Marpeck as a protomodern theologian stressing human autonomy, I interpret his theological vision as opening an understanding of God's presence that takes the humble shape of the incarnated Son. The Platonist-Christian synthesis tends to stress harmony, analogical mediation between God and creation, and 'the many commonalities the believers and unbelievers share as a result of the goodness of God's created order in Christ'.[31] Marpeck's position, rather, stresses the tensions existing between different societies. God's grace is happening as a pneumatological and eschatological event that often stands in tension with what is seen as natural in the present. The practices within Christendom — such as the baptism of children, compulsory church membership, and obligatory participation in the Mass — indicate a theology of divine presence that does not leave sufficient space and time for the other. Thus, Marpeck's sacramental theology seems to imply an *ontology of peace* that affirms a more independent place for the created others, and the possibility of a more indefinite relation between God and creation. According to Marpeck's persecuted minority, there is no coercion in God's work of reconciliation. God is surely present and acts everywhere, but humans are always free to react to this divine gift.

My argument so far is that Marpeck's explication of the events where God's presence is mediated to humans implies an 'ontology of peace'. However, one might ask whether a critical voice from the sixteenth century is still relevant for the present retrieval of a sacramental theology. Thus, I turn to a more recent voice coming from within an explicit sacramental tradition.

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[31] Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, p. 28. He writes, '[L]et me clarify that by no means do I locate myself theologically in the Anabaptist counter-culture tradition.'

Sacrament as a Social Process in Leonardo Boff

The base community in Latin America is a complex phenomenon originating in the 1950s and 1960s, mainly due to the severe crisis caused by the lack of ordained ministries in the area. In response to this crisis, some clergy and religious leaders started helping laypeople organise themselves in small communities for celebration, biblical studies, and mutual support.[32] The liberation theologian Leonardo Boff is perhaps the one who has tried most systematically to generate an ecclesiology from these experiences in his books *Ecclesiogenesis* (originally published in 1977) and *Church: Charism and Power* (originally published in 1981).[33] The theology of liberation and the origins of the base communities in Latin America are not identical. The base communities began earlier and are broader than liberation theology. I do not claim that Boff makes the most precise explication of the ecclesiological implications of this movement, even though he was one influential voice from within this context.[34] Rather, Boff has been chosen as *one* test case to see if some similar traits can be found between his books and my analysis of Marpeck's text. Certainly, sixteenth-century Anabaptist and liberation theologies differ vastly. Boff would probably find the foregoing analysis unduly concerned with the holiness of the church rather than with seeking the liberation of the poor wherever that is happening. And, of course, Boff does not reject the baptism of children. It is, therefore, of great interest that their criticism of the sacramental practices of the

[32] The base communities did not arise spontaneously out of the base but were the result of the consciousness-raising activity of clergy and religious leaders. For the history, see, for example, Andrew Dawson, 'The Origins and Character of the Base Ecclesial Community: A Brazilian Perspective', in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. by Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 109–128, and Philip Wingeier-Rayo, *Where Are the Poor? A Comparison of the Ecclesial Base Communities and Pentecostalism: A Case Study in Cuernavaca, Mexico* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

[33] Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* (London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1986) and Boff, *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (London: SCM Press, 1985).

[34] Boff presented his ecclesial ideas of the later book *Ecclesiogenesis* in a very influential paper at the Second National Base Community Conference in Brazil in 1976 (Dawson, 'The Origins and Character of the Base Ecclesial Community', p. 121). Sturla Stålsett states that Boff has done 'the pioneer work in Liberation-theological ecclesiology' and 'has had to pay the price' ('Liberation Theology', in *Key Theological Thinkers*, ed. by Staale Johannes Kristiansen and Svein Rise (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 617–630 (p. 626)).

church is remarkably similar. In this section I describe these similarities before explicating the implications of this critique in the final section of the article.

The Community of the Faithful

First, Marpeck and Boff closely resemble one another in their criticism of the practices of the church. According to Boff, the main problem with the Latin tradition is that the church became increasingly identified with clericalism, so the church became synonymous with the hierarchy of priests. The priests mediated the grace of God that the laity received. This situation created a division between those who 'produce' and those who 'consume'. Boff even describes this as a kind of alienation, in which the church is *only* rites and sacraments.[35] In contrast to such hierarchical assumptions, he emphasises that the church is constituted of personal, face-to-face meetings. The base communities are 'birthing the church anew' — *ecclesiogenesis*. 'We are not dealing with the expansion of an existing ecclesiastical system, rotating on a sacramental, clerical axis, but with the emergence of another form of being church, rotating on the axis of the word and the laity.'[36] In contrast to most of the priests and the religious leaders who started training laypeople in base communities, Boff emphasises that these communities are not merely movements within the church, they are full expressions of the church. Thus, he prefers to speak of 'base *ecclesial* communities'.

Boff's critique does not imply that he, like the Anabaptists, discard the Catholic tradition. It is important for him to remain within the Catholic Church, and he underlines that grace must be mediated through the historical and institutional church. However, from a position within the church, he seeks a subversion and renewal of traditional structures.[37] Like many others, he claims to continue the *aggiornamento* ('bringing up to date') begun with the Second Vatican Council. With reference to the Council, he makes the people of God,

[35] Boff, *Church*, p. 132.
[36] Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, p. 2.
[37] From another perspective, Ivan Illich develops very much the same criticism out of his Latin American experiences. See 'The Vanishing Clergyman', *The Critic*, 25 (1967), 18–27.

not the hierarchy, the central axis in his ecclesiology. For him, this implies 'a democratisation' in which the church becomes a free and fraternal community with the participation of the greatest number. Without denying the institutional aspects of the church, he writes, '[B]ut the church is also an event. It emerges, is born, and is continually reshaped whenever individuals meet to hear the word of God, believe in it, and vow together to follow Jesus Christ, inspired by the Holy Spirit.'[38] The church happens among persons who respond to God's offer. Thus, all people are equally the people of God. 'All share in Christ, directly and without mediation.'[39]

Boff comes very close to the ecclesiology of Pilgram Marpeck. Like him, Boff does not trust that the bishop and the eucharistic rite create the church. Instead, the living Christ through the Spirit calls the people of God together into a community. Like Marpeck, he rejects the spiritualistic utopia of a community without power and institution. Boff was convinced that the community must always have leaders, institutional structures, and a relationship with the global church and its history. Ecclesial institutions and the communitarian dimension must coexist. However, in relation to his tradition, Boff inverts the relation between those aspects, so the church is thought of from 'the bottom up, from the grassroots, from the "base"'.[40] The risen Christ, present in the Spirit, calls people into community directly. The church is the sacrament of the Holy Spirit. However, he does not speak of the church as a kind of prolongation of the incarnate Christ, as in Marpeck's theology. Boff connects such an idea with a Catholic stress on the institution and not, as Marpeck does, with people following Jesus Christ. Instead, Boff emphasises the Spirit. For him, it implies a less rigid church, one that freely adapts to different circumstances and depends on the work of the Spirit in the lives of all believers. Again, he claims that the church is more of an event than an institution.[41]

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[38] Boff, *Church*, p. 127.
[39] Boff, *Church*, p. 133. The same is stated in Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis,* p. 11.
[40] Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, p. 15.
[41] Boff, *Church*, p. 155. For similar statements see also pp. 144–153 and Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, p. 19.

The Charismatic Community

A second similarity is that Boff also has a broader view of the sacramental life of the church. As a Catholic theologian, he clearly states that grace and salvation are always expressed in a sacramental form. It never comes 'like a bolt from the blue'; it must be made visible. However, the problem arises when this visibility is identified with the hierarchy and their activities. According to Boff, *charisma* is the organising principle of the church. The living Christ through the Spirit creates a community by giving charisma to all people. This phenomenon implies a basic equality: all are sent, and all have responsibilities within the church. Of course, not everyone can do everything. There is a manifold charisma, and through this interdependence, the Spirit constitutes the 'church-as-community'.[42]

Boff's charismatic vision of the church means the co-responsibility of all in the uplifting of the church. Baptism makes the entire people of God priestly. Like Marpeck, Boff argues that the sacramental life of the church cannot be limited to the seven traditional acts in the Catholic tradition. He writes, 'It is beginning to recover from the sacramental amnesia of the Church, brought about by the limitation of the entire sacramental structure to the seven sacraments, at the Council of Trent.'[43] In the base ecclesial communities, the grace of God is also mediated through visible acts as 'community coordination, catechesis, organizing the liturgy, caring for the sick, teaching people to read and write, looking after the poor'.[44] However, the centre and essence of all is always the celebration of faith. He states that it is hunger for the word of God that brings people together. When they read and celebrate their common faith, the experience becomes the 'horizon' through which everything else is understood. The sacramental life must thus do justice to God's all-embracing reality, 'making it possible to see

[42] The most controversial aspect of Boff's position is his argument that the celebration of the Eucharist is a function within the collegiality that belongs to the whole people of God. As a full expression of the church, a base community has the mandate to appoint a man *or a woman* to that function. For Boff's argument for the right of women to be priests, see Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, pp. 76–97.

[43] Boff, *Church*, p. 120.

[44] Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, p. 23.

even the political and the economic as mediation of God's grace or of dis-grace'.[45]

The Sacramental Life as a Social Process

Finally, Boff's broad understanding of the sacramental life represents the church's practices as a social process standing in tension with other social structures. The church is a channel for the type of integral liberation that is so heavily stressed within liberation theology.[46] Too often, sacramental acts are reduced to the intimate and spiritual realm, separate from the social sphere. Priests are defined by *their power to consecrate*, restricted to a cultic sphere. Instead, Boff states, the sacramental life of the church needs to be a *social process* building 'more humane social relationships' that can testify to reconciliation and peace in the Kingdom of God.[47]

Like many in the Free Church tradition, Boff detected a basic reason for the problems in the Constantinian Church. Instead of opposing the influence of the pagans, it adapted to the structures of the empire. 'It offered the empire an ideology that supported the existing order.'[48] Instead of transforming the empire, the church reproduced the structure of the ruling class. Clergy became a ruling class claiming monopoly of the exercise of religious power, while the laity were reduced to an obedient and submissive force in church as in society. To be a channel of the kingdom that Jesus Christ inaugurated, a church must be characterised by kinship, participation, and communion. It must regain this alternative vision of the world opposing that of the ruling class. Such a church stands in tension with powers and rulers. It must be *a church of the diaspora*.[49]

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45 Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, p. 40 f.

46 For its classical expression, see Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (London: SCM, 1973), pp. 69–72.

47 Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, p. 38.

48 Boff, *Church*, p. 50.

49 Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, p. 119. There is a tension between Boff's emphasis on the church as an alternative social community and his understanding of politics as statecraft. In general, liberation theology had an apolitical church, which means that the Christian struggle for justice was by means of statecraft. See Daniel Bell's important study, *Liberation Theology after the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 62–74.

We have seen three aspects where Marpeck's and Boff's critique of the sacramental practices of the church are remarkable similar. Of course, these critical perspectives are not a fair presentation of the diversity and richness in the Christian tradition. However, I think they pinpoint some dangers existing in sacramental traditions. As there always exists an interrelation between theology and practice, it is mandatory to ask in what manner their critique may affect our present sacramental theology.

Conclusions

Sacramental retrieval is an important and valuable contribution to present ecclesiology and ontology. Ontological convictions have practical implications, and practices shape our basic social imaginations. Since theology and practices always are interrelated, I have argued that, before wholeheartedly embracing the present retrieval of a sacramental ontology, we must evaluate the critique of the practices that have dominated sacramental traditions. I have presented Pilgram Marpeck and Leonardo Boff as two examples of such critiques. Drawing on these two examples I now move to raise some qualifications regarding the employment of sacramental theology in relation to both ecclesiology and ontology. First, I summarise how the critiques of Marpeck and Boff serve to modify sacramental ontology, and second, I discuss how such a modification thereby leads us to emphasise ecclesial practices that would otherwise receive inadequate attention.[50]

Sacramental Ontology, Creation and Eschatology

The present sacramental retrieval highlights creation as a divine gift and an analogical mediation of God's presence in all creations. Undoubtedly, this concept is one important aspect of a Christian ontology, and it has crucial implications in relation to the present devastation of creation. However, the rejection of Christendom as the context for sacramental practices implies an ontology of peace. The Christian God is peaceful

[50] It is worth noticing that it is Boff's earlier works that I am analysing and it can be asked whether his later ecological and panentheistic world-view is consistent with this earlier position. Compare Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll: New York: Orbis Books, 2004).

and not violent. Only as relatively independent beings are humans free to respond to divine love. In that case, the history of creation must also be seen as fragile, unfinished, changing, fallen, and ambiguous. This viewpoint is not intended to question the presence and power of God in all reality. Instead, it stresses God's humble presence.[51] When the church testifies to God's universal presence in all creation, it also accepts that this belief is not self-evident. For others, such a conviction seems irrational or superfluous. Life is a divine gift that has been given a relative degree of independence, which also makes life deeply ambiguous. Thus, in contrast to the cultures of Christendom, a theology of *diaspora* does not stress a harmonious analogy between heaven and earth.

Further, sacramental practices as a social process accentuate the tensions that exist between different communities. These tensions imply that a Christian ontology must be emphatically eschatological. In a Platonic-Christian synthesis, eschatology is often connected with the restoration of creation, occurring as a kind of final causality working within history towards fulfilment (the so-called *exitus-reditus* scheme). Conversely, the tradition of the diaspora focuses on *the events* in which the future of God interrupts and transforms human relations into an analogical likeness with the future kingdom. The presence of God is manifest in the Spirit's call challenging creation to move forward towards its transcendent goal in divine communion. In addition, this mediation is as much about God's judgement of the present order, including everything sinful in the church, as it is a wondrous affirmation of God's presence in everything. The future kingdom of peace, reconciliation, joy, and justice always stands in certain tension with the present orders and structures.

Sacramental ontology is an important protest against a spirituality that has been otherworldly and caught up in modern bifurcations between spirit and matter, supernatural and natural, church and everyday life. However, in its protest against secularity, it overstates its limits when it is formulated as a general ontology. Instead, I argue for a more diversified and humble ontology celebrating life as a gift,

[51] Compare how Katherine Sonderegger joins God's omnipotence with humility, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), pp. 151–332.

accepting creation's ambiguity and responsibility, and stressing the Spirit's eschatological working in judgement and transformation. This ontology accepts living within the tensions between praising the God who is present, lamenting God's hiddenness, and longing for a life in greater correspondence with the coming of the Lord. [52]

Renewing Ecclesial Vision and Practices

A humbler ontology is interrelated with ecclesial practices. Hans Boersma emphasises the liturgical celebration and its possibilities to transform human seeing. According to him, the main problem within the present church is its barren worship.[53] Similarly, John Chryssavgis writes from his Orthodox perspective concerning the ecological challenge, 'Paradoxically, ecological corrections may in fact begin with environmental in-action or mere awareness. It is a matter of contemplation, of *seeing* things differently.'[54] A humbler ontology, focused more on ambiguity and eschatological tensions, would not stress a kind of platonic contemplation (*theoria*); rather, it would ask what *actions* (*phronesis*) correspond to the inbreaking of God's kingdom.

Leonardo Boff and Pilgram Marpeck both argue that the sacramental life of the church too often legitimises the present order and the dominant power structures. People go to church to receive sacraments, but they have not been empowered to become a community that transforms lives and circumstances. In the present retrieval of sacramental theology, this challenge is worth listening to. The claim of Marpeck and Boff is that this mediation happens only in a community in which everyone matters in terms of celebration, decision-making, and mission. A strong focus on traditional sacrament still has the obvious

[52] An important example for living within such tension is Sören Kierkegaard's attack on his own Christian Danish culture. For an important study of the 'sacred tension' in his thought, see Matthew T. Nowachek, 'Living within the Sacred Tension: Kierkegaard's Climacean Works as a Guide for Christian Existence', *Heythrop Journal*, 55, no. 5 (2014), 883–902.

[53] Compare his new book, Boersma, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

[54] Chryssavgis, *Creation as Sacrament*, p. 133 (emphasis original). In relation to ecological crises, Chryssavgis emphasises the importance of 'Eastern contemplation' before 'Western activity' (ibid., pp. 130–134). It may be significant that, when Chryssavgis concludes his book with a chapter on 'The Way Forward', it does not describe grass-roots activities but the examples of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis.

risk, as in history, to forward a private and individualistic spirituality that does not challenge the present structures. To be a visible sign of God's peace, reconciliation, and justice, it is important to spotlight also those broader communal actions that are fundamental for upholding a just and peaceful community. That is not to question that the church always lives from the centre where it celebrates God's gifts in worship and the Lord's supper. However, the sacramental traditions have often limited the all-embracing challenge that the Spirit's eschatological presence brings to the present order. Again, the question is not whether God's grace is mediated through created reality but what kind of creational occurrences mediate the presence of the kingdom of God.

Marpeck and Boff focus on events when people together actively embrace God's eschatological gift in their fellowship and mission, including its political and economic relations. Such fragile responses seek to embody a peaceful, sustainable, and just community that creates possibilities for Christian fellowships to testify to new possibilities in new kinds of living.[55] Thus, I doubt that the main problem within the present church is its 'barren worship'. The great challenge remains the renewal of the church so that it, amidst its broken life, will, by God's grace, mediate the presence of the kingdom of God. In relation to ontological syntheses, it is worth remembering that the Messiah who was crucified and raised is still the fullest revelation of the Creator of heaven and earth.

[55] Arne Rasmusson has, in several works, argued the importance of dissident Protestantism for social transformation since such thinkers put into practice new ways of living. See *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), and 'Radical Orthodoxy on Catholicism, Protestantism and Liberalism/Liberality: On the Use of Historical Narratives and Quantitative Methods in Political Theology', *Modern Theology*, 37, no. 1 (2021), 1–17.

Miracle of the Mundane: The Continuing Legacy of Interdependence in The Estonian Baptist and Free Church Union

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Abstract:
This article examines the origins of interdependence in the formation story of the Estonian Union of Evangelical Christian and Baptist Churches (EECB) and demonstrates how ongoing commitment to interdependence in the form of congregational partnership enables EECB congregations to pursue their missional calling. The consistent choice to embrace the tensions and challenges of what historian Toivo Pilli characterises as a 'mosaic movement' have provided the Union with a rich theological legacy and an untapped well of strategic advantage for vibrant witness in challenging times.[1] Evidence of this strategic advantage is presented by introducing a novel approach to the study of inter-congregational partnership networks. Closing remarks address critical concerns associated with network methods and weigh the promise and limitations of viewing and actively developing baptistic interdependency using relational network analysis.

Keywords:
Interdependence; fellowship; partnership; network analysis

Introduction

Former rector of the International Baptist Theological Seminary (Prague) Dr Keith Jones has argued that one of the key characteristics of baptistic identity is a vibrant ecclesial interdependence expressed at local, regional, international, and ecumenical levels, particularly in the European context where he served.[2] One of Jones's key observations is that the church's paradoxical commitment to both local autonomy and

[1] Toivo Pilli, *Usu Värvid ja Varjundid* [Colours and Shades of Faith] (Tallinn: Allika, 2007), p. 85.
[2] Keith Jones, *The European Baptist Federation: A Case Study in European Baptist Interdependency 1950–2006* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009). In 2014, the seminary became the International Baptist Theological Study Centre, based in Amsterdam.

covenantal fellowship is best described as a web of organic connections rather than the more familiar organisational structure of a hierarchical pyramid or concentric circles of association. I find Jones's vision for baptistic interdependency inspiring and elegant, and in short order I will demonstrate how this vision has borne itself out in the small Baltic country of Estonia. But I am also quite sure that his vision is not uncontested. There may be isolated congregations or national bodies that have little experience of fellowship outside of their walls or borders. Certainly, the myriad Baptist conferences populating the North American scene where I grew up would suggest some internal limit to the scope of Jones's argument. It may be that the distance afforded by a birds-eye view, or a retrospective gaze, is required to see beyond the everyday toils and tensions that can characterise inter-church relationships. For this reason, consideration of interdependence can only benefit from the illustration of positive examples. There are places in the world in which ecclesial interdependence can be perceived in the day-to-day realities of congregational life and missional action. Examining these instantiations can help to bring a seemingly unattainable goal within reach of any committed body.

One such place where interdependence can be witnessed in situ is the Baltic country of Estonia. I count it as one of the privileges of my missionary career to have witnessed first-hand the unique fellowship which connects the congregations comprising the Estonian Evangelical Christian and Baptist Church (hereafter EECB) Union and shapes their missional pursuits. Indeed, I count the phenomena of Estonian free church partnership to be nothing less than a miracle, given the circumstances in which it was formed and the transformational impact it has had on Union life and function. It may well be that the mundane (in the sense of pragmatic or everyday) nature of this partnership is one reason why it tends to go unrecognised and largely uncelebrated on Estonian soil. It must also be said that the Estonian brand of baptistic interdependence is no panacea. Not all churches contribute to the wider fellowship, and significant differences of theological emphasis or spiritual practice keep EECB unity in a state of constant negotiation. But generally, despite the difficulties and imperfections, partnership between EECB churches has become a practised means of worship (in

the words of Eugene Peterson, 'a long obedience in the same direction') and a testimony to the watching world.[3]

The story of how this interdependence developed in the EECB Union can be traced through its formation story. Estonian church historian Toivo Pilli has investigated the history of the EECB at length and my comments here are drawn from his extensive investigations appearing in both Estonian and English.[4] A simplified sketch of the Union's history can be built around the years of Soviet occupation (1941–1991), in which formerly distinct Baptist, Free Revivalist (*priilased*), Evangelical Christian, and Pentecostal traditions were forced to coexist quite literally 'under one roof'.[5] Repressions associated with the forced unification were arguably designed to constrict and suppress Christianity's ability to function effectively, but in the case of Estonia served to forge a refined alloy of resilient fellowship from the EECB's diverse theological traditions. When Estonia declared independence

[3] Inter-ecclesial cooperation is not limited to the EECB Union, but also occurs frequently between churches from distinct confessions. The story of Estonian ecumenical partnership is equally deserving of celebration and this effort may benefit from some of the investigative methods I will be proposing in the latter half of my discussion. However, even though the cooperative spirit is widespread among Estonian churches, I would maintain that the EECB Union is unique in its persistent choice for conscientious interdependence and because of this has deeply influenced Estonian ecumenism for the better. For a historical discussion of EECB contributions to Estonian ecumenism, see Riho Altnurme, ed., *History of Estonian Ecumenism* (Tartu/Tallinn: Estonian Council of Churches, 2009), pp. 83–105, 171–193. The words of Eugene Peterson are taken from the title of his book*: A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1980).

[4] I have relied heavily on Pilli's works in Estonian: *Usu Värvid ja Varjundid* [Colours and Shades of Faith] (Tallinn: Allika, 2007); Üllas Linder and Toivo Pilli, eds, *Osaduses Kasvanud* [Formed in Fellowship] (Tallinn: Eesti EKB Koguduste Liit, 2009). However, Pilli develops much of the same content in following English language sources: 'Baptists in Estonia 1884–1940', *Baptist Quarterly*, 34, no. 1 (2001), 27−34; 'Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Estonia, 1945–1989: Survival Techniques, Outreach Efforts, Search for Identity', *Baptist History and Heritage*, 36 (2001), 113–135; 'The Forced Blessing of Unity: Formation of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Estonia', *Teologinen Aikakauskirja*, 6 (2003), 548−562; 'From A Thunderstorm to Settled Still Life', *Baptist Quarterly*, 41, no. 4 (2005), 206–233; *Dance or Die: The Shaping of Estonian Baptist Identity under Communism* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008); 'The West Coast Revival in Estonia, 1873–1884', *Baptistic Theologies*, 10, no. 1 (2018), 1–17.

[5] This unification of Evangelical Christian and Baptist churches was implemented across the Soviet Union. At the start of the reform, the Oleviste Church in Tallinn was assigned to house eight distinct congregations. However, rather than crumbling under the weight of division, Oleviste became a beacon of evangelical witness and in the late 1970s was the site of an astonishing outpouring of the Holy Spirit in revival and renewal.

from the Soviet Union and the Iron Curtain began to rend from north to south, the pressure of forced co-existence was relieved. In other former Soviet countries, such as Russia and Ukraine, similar unions resolved into their constituent parts. But the EECB was unique in its commitment to seek a unified path and to continue forging a common identity and mission, even in the absence of external pressure.[6]

We might summarise this brief storyline in three periods: foundation (pre-World War Two), formation (Soviet occupation) and freedom (1991 onward). The story of the EECB Church Union's development over all three periods is fascinating and well worth presenting to a wider audience. But in this article, I want to draw attention to three elements from across the narrative that in combination inform the EECB's ongoing practice of congregational interdependence: movement identity, unity in diversity, and 'in-tensioned fellowship'.

Foundational Elements of Estonian Baptistic Interdependence

The first contributing element to the EECB's eventual interdependence is *movement identity*. The language of movement originates in the formative experiences of each of the EECB's four constituent traditions and has continued to be favoured (e.g. in official development plans) over against the language of institutional identity.[7] Each of these traditions began as revival or renewal movements and as such were initially relegated to a minority position in the landscape of Estonia's established churches. However, this minority position was also coupled with a strong sense of prophetic voice calling the established denominations to repentance or to an increase of commitment and fruitfulness. As such, attendance, participation, and committed discipleship marked identification with these movements long before ecclesial structure or official recognition provided any context for

[6] Pilli, *Usu Värvid*, pp. 14–15.

[7] Estonian Evangelical Christian and Baptist Union, '2012–2017 EECB Development Plan', <https://kogudused.ee/dokumendid/eesti-ekb-koguduste-liidu-arengukava-aastateks-2012-2017> [accessed 30 July 2021]; '2018–2023 EECB Development Plan' <https://teek.ee/teemad/50-liit/2204-ekb-liidu-arengukavast-2018-2023> [accessed 30 July 2021].

membership. Eventually, each tradition developed a recognisable ecclesial structure replete with meeting houses, clergy, and distinct bylaws. But before these forms became clear, the revival movements were — like the brackish waters of the Baltic Sea — a mix of religious backgrounds, conversion stories, spiritual experiences, and doctrinal convictions. All of this eventually had to be navigated on the path to distinct identity. But the fluid nature of movement identity appears to have instilled a combination of relational and theological flexibility coupled with firm conviction. It was arguably this combination which enabled these distinct revival movements to identify as churches in the foundational era, for those churches to combine under duress and for the EECB Union to transform into a missional fraternity in the formational era, and for that fraternity to continue to choose movement identity over institutional security in the freedom era.[8]

The second element contributing to the EECB's interdependence is a dual commitment to *diversity and unity*. The diversity side of this equation has been referenced above but deserves further elaboration. Each of the EECB's founding evangelical traditions were distinct in their experience and expression of faith but also were each sparked by a distinct foreign influence in geographical locations removed from the seats of power. Taken together, this may indicate a common desire for a counterpoint to the dominant religious voices of the day.[9] Whatever the initial attraction was, each movement took root

[8] In 2009, following a season in which other free church denominations made moves to establish institutional legitimacy, former EECB President Joosep Tammo reaffirmed the roots of the Union's movement in his admonition to embrace an identity based in an 'independent congregational network' and to avoid at all costs 'the temptation to become a [C]hurch'. (Joosep Tammo, 'Pilk tulevikku', in *Osaduses Kasvanud*, ed. by Üllas Linder and Toivo Pilli (Tallinn: Eesti EKB Koguduste Liit, 2009), 55–64 (p. 56).

[9] The Free Revivalist movement was initiated by Swedish missionaries Thure Emmanuel Thoren and Lars Österblomon on Vormsi Island in 1873 and spread over the entirety of the western maritime region. This revival was in full swing when German Baptist Adam Schiewe arrived from St Petersburg in 1884 and founded the first Baptist church in Haapsalu. The Evangelical Christians were founded by Jewish Lutheran convert Johannes Rubanovitsch, who held open-air revival meetings on Stroomi Beach in Tallinn, beginning in 1905, and appealed particularly to Lutheran Brethren. The Pentecostal movement traces its roots to Narva, on the opposite side of the country, and to the influence of Finn Pekka Hakkarainen who began preaching there in 1907. See Ringo Ringvee, 'Charismatic Christianity and Pentecostal Churches in Estonia from a Historical Perspective', *Approaching Religion*, 5, no. 1 (2015), 57–66 (p.58).

within the Estonian population, growing numerically both by means of transfer and conversion, and gaining internal definition as indigenous leadership championed the cause. Over time, each movement developed its own distinct theological and spiritual emphases and character traits which later were combined to form the 'mosaic movement' Pilli describes in his discussion of EECB history and identity. In Pilli's estimation, the Free Revivalists contributed zeal and immediacy of personal experience, the Baptists contributed programmatic development and theological education, the Evangelical Christians brought a readiness to cooperate, and the Pentecostals lent a broad conception of God.[10] Each group might have continued to develop over against the others were it not for an unexpected providence appearing in the combination of Soviet restrictions on independent religious expression and the willingness of each tradition to actively pursue a common path in spite of obvious difficulties and limitations.

While the will to pursue this common path was growing well before the 1940s, and was likely well in hand by the time circumstantial pressure began to be applied,[11] the way ahead would prove to be challenging indeed, not only because of the political pressures of life under Soviet authority but also because of the significant differences between the four traditions. The path to eventual unity would require continual navigation.

The Evangelical Christians experienced an early form of this tension when infant-baptised Lutheran Brethren, who had happily attended open-air meetings, resisted the call to be re-baptised. The commitment to believer's baptism was maintained of course, but baptismal hospitality was extended to Lutherans who claimed their previous baptism as legitimate, a compromise which continues to the

[10] Pilli, *Usu Värvid*, pp. 222–236.

[11] Pilli indicates that the desire for unity was present before the imposition of Soviet reforms, though earlier attempts never achieved widespread success. See Toivo Pilli, 'Ecumenical Relations of the Free Churches', in *History of Estonian Ecumenism*, ed. by Riho Altnurme (Tartu/Tallinn: Estonian Council of Churches, 2009), 83–105 (pp. 90–93).

present day.[12] Similar tensions continued to arise in the early years of unification, particularly when distinct worship styles were combined into one meeting. As a condition of their unification, Free Revivalists had insisted on the ability to continue 'jumping in the Spirit' and Pentecostals on the freedom to practise and teach speaking in tongues. Both requests were honoured.[13] But Baptist pastor Oskar Olvik and theologian Osvald Tärk were driven to distraction when believers from these diverse expressions attempted to worship together in the thunderous stone halls of the iconic Oleviste church.[14] These difficult accommodations proved successful, persisting and deepening as EECB leaders guided their flock through the troubled waters of the Soviet occupation. In 1954, a distance study programme was established to provide theological education and essential fellowship to pastors from all around Estonia. This was certainly one of the ways in which unity was reaffirmed even in difficult circumstances. The programme lasted until 1960 when it was closed down under Kruschev's atheistic reforms.[15] These reforms resulted in spasms of dissent across the All Union ECB, but the Estonian fellowship was able to hold together while the unions in Russia and Ukraine fell apart.[16] The calm following this storm eased some of the pressures placed on the churches, and the EECB's nascent unity solidified under council-based leadership and was deepened by the affirmations of international visitors.[17]

What emerges from this picture is that the EECB consistently chose for the harder path of a tensioned existence, particularly at historical inflection points but also quite clearly as a matter of course. This is the third element I discern from the EECB story: what I would call 'in-tensioned fellowship'. One might argue that the current unity is only a combination of historical circumstances conspiring to produce a foreseeable result. Circumstances combine rival movements, external

[12] Peeter Roosimaa, 'Eesti Evangeeliumi Kristlaste Vabakoguduse moodustamine', in *Osaduses Kasvanud*, ed. by Üllas Linder and Toivo Pilli (Tallinn: Eesti EKB Koguduste Liit, 2009), 33-45 (pp. 40–42).
[13] Pilli, 'Forced Blessing', pp. 552–53.
[14] Pilli, *Usu Värvid*, p. 33.
[15] Ibid. pp. 23–32.
[16] Pilli, 'Thunderstorm', pp. 210–11.
[17] Ibid., pp. 211–18.

pressures forge new relationships, a minimal threshold of commonality is reached, differences are minimised in the context of opposition, and eventually a new body is formed. But it needs to be kept in mind that ecclesial disunity was the intended result of the Soviet reforms and lasting unity after freedom was hardly a foregone conclusion for unions in other soviet republics. Unique in the case of Estonia, when fifty years of cold east wind were finally blown away by a warm westerly front, EECB congregations decided against re-establishing their independent movements and decided for continuing together on the tensioned path.

In addition to the efforts at inclusion and unification mentioned above, we can trace this intentionality along theological lines. This commitment can be observed in the perennial effort to articulate EECB identity and doctrine. In contrast to the multi-volume doctrinal statements and polity manuals I studied for ordination in my tradition, EECB statements are terse and concise, highlighting only that which is both essential and common to all. Joosep Tammo and Peeter Roosimaa's *Teachings of the Bible* (*Piibli Õpetus)* is a good example and has become the EECB's classic theological handbook for pastors.[18] *Teachings* combines orthodox Christian doctrine and free church distinctives, relying heavily on passages from the Bible to illustrate its positions. It is accessible for the young, instructive for the mature, complete in naming the essentials but discerning in what is left to be defined by the reader. Reading *Teachings*, one gets the sense that nothing is said without holding competing views in tension.

Theologising in the EECB is not simply a matter of clarifying positions but about learning to inhabit theological tension between competing views. To my mind, this is the unique legacy of EECB doctrinal life and also a distinct mark of interdependence: a constant theological negotiation between constituent positions. Pilli characterises this legacy as 'bipolar' in the sense that EECB doctrine and unity is not defined by one stance over against another as much as by a tensioned space inhabited between essential viewpoints.[19]

[18] Joosep Tammo and Peeter Roosimaa, *Piibli Õpetus* [Teachings of the Bible] (Tallinn: Eesti EKB Liit, 1998).
[19] Ibid., pp. 41–45.

These elements of EECB interdependence have something in common with reinforced concrete. By virtue of its chemical composition, concrete powder mixed with sand, gravel, and water will harden into a rock-like crystalline structure able to withstand immense compressive forces. The essential elements of EECB commitment to movement, diversity, and unity likewise have combined to create an incredibly resilient ecclesial compound that holds together even under immense external stress. But just as concrete without the reinforcement of iron rebar will crumble as it stretches under tensile forces, the EECB's unity might also have eventually crumbled (as did other Unions elsewhere) were it not for their consistent choice for a tensioned existence. The choice to embrace tension creates resilient fellowship.

I propose that this *in-tensioning* — that is, the purposeful creation and celebration of relational and theological tension, and the commitment to coexist within that tensioned space — lies at the heart of EECB interdependence. Paul Fiddes' treatment of covenant is particularly helpful in understanding how God creates space for relationship with us and enters that space cognisant of the trouble this will entail.[20] It is on the basis of God's covenant with us that we can enter into such in-tensioned relationships with one another and thereby extend God's grace over the spaces between us and beyond. However, I find that Fiddes' pastoral theology of 'participating in God' elevates ecclesial interdependence from a state of being to a functional partnership in which mundane practices are indeed made miraculous.[21] As a disciple of Jesus, I know that the life of faith must entail a transformation of the mundane into the sublime. This is the miracle we crave, whether it be visible and external or intimately personal and private. But as a pastor and a missionary, I am equally convinced that the sublime (transcendent truth) must also become mundane, earthen, and tillable. What is interdependence if only a theory or a memory? Where can we perceive interdependence in action today? In the next section I illustrate some of the important ways that interdependence

[20] Paul Fiddes, Roger Hayden, Richard L. Kidd, Keith W. Clements, and Brian Haymes, *Bound to Love* (London: Baptist Union, 1985); Paul Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology,* Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2003).
[21] Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Paternoster, 2000).

plays out in the contemporary Estonian context by referencing a longitudinal study of EECB congregational partnerships.

Interdependence as Partnership

I made reference earlier to my conviction that the interdependence exhibited within the EECB constitutes a miracle of the mundane. The reason for this turn of phrase is that there are some elements of our spiritual transformation that seem so common as to be unremarkable. And yet when viewed in a new light, they prove foundational for so much of what directs our attention. I believe that in addition to being an essential feature of baptistic ecclesiology and a distinct form of imaging God, interdependence forms an innervated substrate upon which an entire ecclesial biome can grow and prosper.

A fascinating discovery from the forests near my childhood home in the Pacific Northwest may help to illustrate the real importance of this observation. Dr Suzanne Simmard from the University of British Columbia observed early in her career that even in ideal circumstances, cedar seedlings were more susceptible to disease when other tree species in the area were removed from the local ecology. When she began investigating the forest soil on a hunch, she discovered a hidden network of mycorrhizal fungi whose thread-like strands connected the entire forest in a vast web. By tracing the transmission of radioactive carbon through this underground network, Simmard discovered that trees could communicate across great distances and even between species, exchanging resources, signals, and transferring important resistance in case of disease. This discovery has sparked something of a revolution in botanists' understanding of forest ecology, suggesting that trees are not lone organisms competing for light and nutrients but rather parts of one large, connected organism.[22]

I share Simmard's hunch that what we tread underfoot is just as essential to the church's sustained ministry and missional effectiveness

[22] Suzanne Simmard, 'How Trees Talk to Each Other', *Ted Talks:* <https://www.ted.com/talks/suzanne_simard_how_trees_talk_to_each_other> [accessed 29 July 2021].

as all that towers above and around us. But how do we communicate this? How can we illustrate the amazing potential of this mundane miracle?

Introducing the Relational Survey

In 2012, I had my first opportunity to sift through the detritus of the EECB's forest floor while serving as secretary of the Mission Council. Under the leadership of President Meego Remmel, the board of elders had been examining questions of missional engagement through the lens of regional development. Our thinking was that administrative regions not only divided the Union into geographically manageable portions, but that the churches in each region shared culture and circumstances that would help to define their mission more closely. We noticed that in administrative regions where churches were well connected and collegial, congregations were able to sustain their ministry in a variety of circumstances, leaders were optimistic about their prospects, and missional initiatives were quick to bear fruit. Conversely, regions marked by strife or competition felt like rocky soil: churches lived or died on their own merits and the seeds of evangelism seldom found root, even in situations of abundance.

In order to develop a better sense of the ways in which our congregations were relating, we decided to include a set of relational questions in our annual statistics drive. These questions were worded as broadly and simply as possible in order to elicit a wide response and engender personal reflection: 'Name up to three churches you would consider your most active partners in the last year.' This question format was repeated for ecumenical, organisational, and international partnerships. These relational questions have been included in our Union's statistics drive every year and now provide us with a wealth of data, not only on the relationships between congregations and the dynamics they contribute, but also importantly in terms of raising questions about the content, quality, and motivations embedded in those relationships.

A wide body of interdisciplinary research on network dynamics and analysis has assisted us in analysing this dataset.[23] There is such a wealth of potential within the dataset — from the nature of relationships to the dynamics they help to engender, as well as changes on both levels over time — that it would be foolhardy to attempt to describe them all in this limited setting. But I hope to offer an overview of network insights and applications and provide a handful of examples which will demonstrate the promise of viewing partnership in this way.

Dynamics of the Partnership Network

Before moving into a discussion of partnership network dynamics, it is important to offer clarity on what I mean by partnership. As I mentioned above, partnership was intentionally left undefined in our original survey in order to elicit a wide response and to gather insight into the respondents' own definitions. Unsurprisingly, there are different kinds of partnerships reported in our survey. I have not yet conducted formal qualitative research on the nature of the relationships listed in our annual survey and so my comments here should be taken with some caution. But based on the results of eight years of data and numerous informal conversations with regional leaders, pastors, and their congregations, I can propose four general categories of relational types that are reported in our survey: fraternal, associative, occasional, and promotional.

Fraternal partnerships are very strong and tend to follow a pastor from one congregational assignment to another. These relationships are often forged in seminary cohorts where personal formation and shared theological vision naturally spill over into the formation of lifelong friendships. Kinship relationships within pastoral dynasties also fall into this category, and we will sometimes see clear connections crossing the corners of Estonia that fall along known familial lines.

[23] Good introductions to the field can be found in the following: Garry Robins, *Doing Network Research* (London: Sage Publishing, 2015); and Silvia Dominguez and Betina Hollstein, *Mixed Methods Social Networks Research* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Associative partnerships between geographically or ethnically related churches form the majority of the Union's partnerships. Like collegial relationships, these associative relationships are typically quite strong but are forged by common circumstances (most often geography). One of the marks of a strong administrative region tends to be a relatively high percentage of associative relationships within its ranks, though the patterns in each region will suggest unique strategic emphases.

Occasional partnerships also play an important role in the Union by connecting congregations with similar missional interests on a temporary basis. These project-based relationships provide a space for focused collaboration involving an exchange of insights, perspectives, and experiences as well as the discipline of cooperative action with all the mutual submission that this entails. While occasional relationships may shift from one year to the next, they play a very important role in exchanging information across the entire network and generating overall goodwill across associative boundaries.

The final category I have provisionally named *promotional partnerships*. The most common of these relationships is the prayer partner system advocated by former Mission Secretary Indrek Luide, whose vision was to create a network generated each year at random that would serve to familiarise congregations that might not otherwise relate with one another. These promotional relationships seldom last longer than a year, but they send important impulses across the network and keep the lines of communication open and stimulated.

Each church leader who completes the relational survey may list up to three partners.[24] The resulting table of relational pairs can then be

[24] The limitation to three partners is designed to force respondents to evaluate their relationships and report only those they deem most active. This limit is in some ways arbitrary, but in my experience reflects a threshold beyond which only the most gregarious partners are able to maintain their relationships. In truth, some respondents have found this limitation to be far too constricting and insist that it is impossible to choose between their dear friends. Some have nominated more partners than are allowed by reporting 'all neighbouring churches' or by listing additional partner churches under the 'ecumenical' rubric. In my experience, the churches that go to these lengths do in fact relate more actively. The Island of Hiiumaa is a good example, where churches across the island's denominational spectrum meet weekly to pray with one another and collaborate. Here, the number of active relationships maintained by the regional

standardised, coded for privacy, and compiled into an elegant network map for visualisation and analysis.[25] As can been seen, in the network map (figure 1) churches are indicated by dots coloured according to region and roughly located according to geographical position, and relationships between churches appear as arcs connecting two dots. The partnership network is said to be directional because we recognise a qualitative difference between nominating a partner and being named as a partner. A mutual relationship would thus appear as a double-headed arrow between churches who identify one another as partners. With this basic understanding of relationships in mind, we can consider levels of network dynamics and the associated applications for mission. There are four levels of network dynamics that I have focused on in my investigations of the partnership network: partnerships themselves (dyads), pathways of partnership, communities, and the system in its entirety.[26]

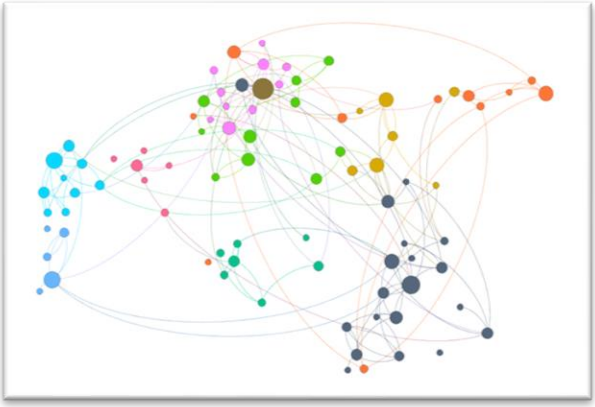

Figure 1: 2020 EECB Partnership Network Map. Congregations are represented by dots sized proportionally by membership, coloured according to administrative region, and arranged approximately as they would be distributed geographically.

director's church far exceed those of the most active mainland churches. Still, for the purposes of this study and standardisation of network metrics, the limitation of three must remain.

[25] I recommend Gephi <https://www.gephi.org/> [last accessed 19 April 2022] for early forays into network visualisation and analysis. A more accessible model, though a more limited option, is available online at *Polinode* https://www.polinode.com/> [accessed 26 January 2022].

[26] For the purposes of this article, I focus only on partnerships between churches in the EECB Union and exclude our data on ecumenical, international, and organisational partnerships.

Network insights at the level of the relationship

The basic unit of any network is the relationship (a dyad) which consists of two actors and a connection between them. Once we aggregate the dyads which house these relationships, we can begin to speak of a system or network with its own set of relational dynamics.[27]

I have described the kinds of dyadic relationships reflected in our survey but more can be said about the relational dynamics that these partnerships reveal. A key to uncovering these insights is the distinction between nominating (active) and nominated (passive) partners. A survey respondent (usually the church's pastor or elder) names other churches as partners and therefore can only be a nominator in the context of their survey, though their church may be nominated in the surveys of other churches. We can argue, then, (and this is indeed part of our intent) that the relational survey encourages *connectional initiative* in the form of partner nominations.

Be that as it may, for some in the Union, three partnerships are consistently three nominations too many. These churches appear as isolates and occur for a number of reasons. Some are simply 'lone-wolves' who would prefer to be left to their own devices. Of these, some are strong enough or large enough to function in this way and still maintain their effectiveness, while others are clearly in the process of dying a lonely death. We also find pariahs among the isolates, which is to say that they are being isolated by potential partners for one reason or another. In a voluntary network, isolation can be an effective means of enforcing constraint without having to legislate. Finally, we also find as-yet unregistered church plants in this group, since they are not yet able to submit an official church survey. This may highlight an area of

[27] I have found the relational principles underlying network analysis to be very helpful in a number of theological applications. While this article focuses on networks of churches, the same approach can be applied to any set of actors whose activity must be described in terms of their relationships. For example, I have employed this approach to helpful effect in the setting of congregational consultation where member interactions can be said to function as an unfolding relational narrative. The same logic applies well to biblical criticism, a good example of which can be found in my analysis of integration and survival strategies in the Book of Ruth (www.edminsters.com/series/ruths-solution). Alexander-Kenneth Nagel provides a fine article explaining potential applications and methods in 'Measuring the Relational: How to Collect Data on Religious Networks', *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*, 3 (2012), 181–205.

strategic focus for regional leaders intent on nurturing new churches and gaining access to their insights and innovations. If we want our youngest churches to become integrated into the greater whole, it would benefit us to explicitly impart the value of interdependence both to those who are being sent as well as to those from whom they have been sent.

Most respondents nominate somewhere between one and three active partnerships (an overall average of 1.89 nominations per church in 2020). Once all these nominations have been tabulated, we can see that most churches will have some combination of outgoing and incoming connections. In past years I have analysed where *connectional initiative* tends to originate and have discovered that a majority of the network's total connections come from the EECB's smaller churches. It seems reasonable to assume that in general, as a church grows in number, its ministerial focus may turn more to the development and execution of programmes and services. If churches in this position can maintain receptivity to partnership and are actively sharing their resources and opportunities, they may be named as a partner by other churches and attain a degree of *connectional prestige*. Larger churches in urban centres often register high prestige, and the iconic Oleviste Church (large brown node, top-centre of network map, figure 1) in Tallinn's Old Town is the classic example of a prestigious nominee. The connections attributable to Oleviste (in a typical year) are exclusively incoming and exceed the combined incoming and outgoing connections of all but the most active partners in the network.[28] But importantly, the web connecting our churches would disappear into a simple association were it not for the connections provided largely by small and mid-sized churches whose *connectional initiative* links the majority of the network and creates the pathways enabling the exchange of partnership, resources, and goodwill.

[28] It is fascinating to note that this year for the first time, a related but independent free church outside of our denomination achieved the same level of prestige as the Oleviste Church. For this reason, churches seeking some degree of network influence would be well advised to engage actively in the network and not rely on passive nominations to establish their importance.

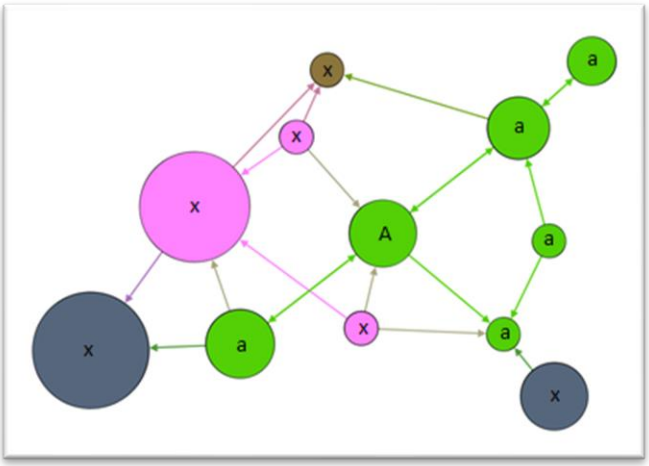

Figure 2: The author's church (A) and its neighbourhood network. Note mutual ties within the region, incoming and outgoing partnerships shared across home (a) and neighbouring (x) administrative regions, and indirect access to churches further afield.

The direction implied in partnership nominations leads to another important insight into the structures contributing to a denominational network. Perhaps the strongest dyadic relationship indicated by this model is a reciprocal relationship, in which parties nominate one another in the same year. The relationships that persist in this form from one year to the next generally indicate 'real partnerships' and provide immense stability to the clusters and regions in which they occur. Figure 2 illustrates the occurrence of directional and mutual ties among the author's congregational partnerships. Regions containing multiple mutual partnerships seem to have a kind of skeletal structure upon which relational muscle and sinew can be attached in various permutations from one year to the next. The regions of Southern Estonia (including the city of Tartu and the rural areas surrounding it; dark grey in all figures), Viru (a rural region surrounding the city of Rakvere; yellow in all figures) and the Island of Hiiumaa (light blue in all figures) all display a high degree of these mutual dyadic relationships and also tend to be stable, even in the face of geographic isolation, lack of resources, or seasons of crisis. This local strength is even more stable when relationships form a triangle (called clustering), though at some point this stability can limit motivation for outreach.

Partnership pathways

The partnership network is constructed on the foundation of a church's nominated partners. As partnership connections accumulate, pathways across the network enable the transmission of resources, ideas, theology, and encouragement from one side of the network to another. Graph visualisation software makes it possible to reconstruct this tangle of connections such that closely connected nodes are located nearer to one another and strategic gaps are easier to recognise. At this point, it is possible to see areas in which nodes are embedded in dense nests, and holes or sparse patches appearing between the nests. How might we assign influence on such a map? If a church enjoys high prestige but is located in an area of redundant and overlapping pathways, their absence might be an inconvenience for their partners but the other pathways in the area would redirect traffic to account for the disruption. This hints at another important measurement of influence in relational networks referred to as betweenness. Partners with high betweenness are like central intersections in a regional hub city: almost all traffic from one location to another passes through that point. Churches with high betweenness have enormous access to resources and ideas not only from local sources but also from across the network. But they also connect geographically, theologically, or culturally disparate parts of the network. The maps in figure 3 illustrate the difference between nodes sized by membership, prestige, and betweenness. Unsurprisingly, the churches of regional administrators or hub churches frequently have a high betweenness score because of their important bridge-building role between their region and the rest of the Union. But remarkably, a very small church in a distant corner of the country (Käina Church on Hiiumaa Island, or the Rakke Church in Viru for example) can also enjoy increased access to partners across the EECB simply by virtue of the number of pathways that pass across its radar and rely on it as a relay station.

Figure 3: Comparative methods of measuring influence by (L–R) membership, prestige, and betweenness. Note that the Oleviste Church (large brown node in the leftmost map) is dominant in terms of relative betweenness, i.e. signal transmission across the network.

Toward a partnership model of missional effectiveness

At this point, we have the basic tools necessary to formulate and test an initial hypothesised link between missional effectiveness and partnership. If we posit that missional effectiveness involves an aspect of innovative potential and that innovation requires (at least in part) access to both ideas and resources, then we can employ regional averages of betweenness (access to fresh ideas or creative potential) and clustering (local resilience or cooperative potential) to see what regions are likely to have high innovative capacity.[29]

Figure 4 shows the relationship between creative and cooperative potential at the level of regional averages. I interpret these charts as innovation strategies rather than scoring. For example, the Oleviste Church (large brown bubble, lower left-hand corner) ranks low on network-based innovation scores because all of their connections are inwardly directed. Oleviste's innovative potential is not network-based, but rather internal to their high-membership church. Their high prestige ranking (discussed earlier) indicates that their role in the network is to receive partnership nominations from smaller churches and to share the innovations internal to their system. This receptive network strategy seems entirely appropriate for a mega church managing enormous

[29] I admit to conceptual holes in my experiment, including a rudimentary understanding of innovative potential and the inability (as yet) to correlate it with the real missional effectiveness of local churches. But this early approach at least illustrates a possible path using network modelling.

internal resources and potentials. Conversely, Hiiu Island (turquoise bubble, upper right-hand corner) is on the opposite end of the spectrum with high average scores in both cooperative and creative potential. The combination of a long legacy of partnership between the Hiiu churches and strong partnerships with the mainland allows Hiiu to persist in saturating its landmass with tenaciously persistent albeit very small congregations.

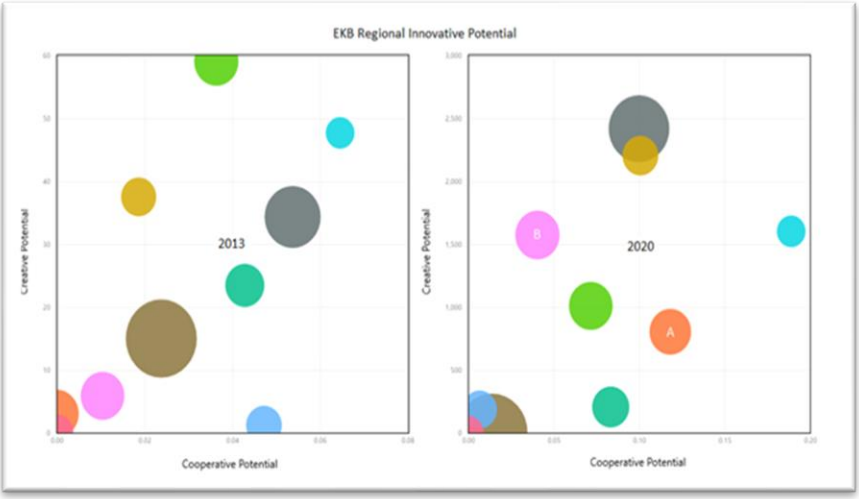

Figure 4: Innovation as cooperative and creative potential (2013 vs 2020). Movement between quadrants is notable. Regions A and B have increased cooperative and creative potential respectively as a result of more active partnership nominations. Innovation graphs are colour coded to match regions in the previous network maps. Bubbles are sized according to total membership of all churches in a region and positioned vertically by the creative potential and horizontally by cooperative potential. Notice that scale of x and y axes has increased dramatically based on an increase in the average number of connections.

Partnership dynamics across the system

Two tests of the innovative capacity hypothesis can be observed across the network: missional extension and strategic contraction. Church planting provides us with a test for missional extension. In the early 2010s, the city of Tartu was the site of multiple successful church plants, most of which trace their lineage to Tartu's relationally rich Salem Baptist Church. During the same period, Tallinn — a far more prosperous city — also saw attempts at church planting, but with fewer

successes. Those that did succeed had significant backing from resource rich partners. Why was Tartu so fertile when Tallinn seemed such hard ground? The partnership model suggests that high innovative potential might provide an explanation. Indeed, all successful church planting activity in Estonia from 2010 to 2020 occurred in regions with consistently high creative potential and moderate to high cooperative potential (including Hiiu Island). The exception is Tallinn, which saw a burst of successful church planting in recent years when a team from the Oleviste church matched the efforts of satellite groups extended from Tartu. In all of these cases it seems clear that a potential source of church planting success is access to a resource rich nest of supportive partnerships. When Tallinn lacked those connections, church planting struggled (with the early exception of Oleviste's Laagri church plant). The tide turned when relational strength was lent from Southern Estonia and extended from Oleviste's internal abundance to create a virtual nest where a local nest was lacking. It is significant that Tallinn's average innovative potential has increased dramatically from 2013 to 2020, possibly partly due to the increased connectional culture accompanying new church plants and to the connectional influence of church planter and former missionary to China Tõnis Roosimaa.[30] It is notable among church plants across Estonia that in their formative years they typically report multiple organisational and international partners while nominating only their sponsoring church as an EECB partner. If it were not for the fact that this combination seems to persist for up to five years, one could argue that this is simply a slow build to network fellowship. But I submit that this instinct allows church plants to exist in the innovative space on the periphery of the EECB fellowship where they can exploit the network's porous border.[31] In this way, they avoid the behavioural constraints experienced by established churches deeply embedded in the network, are able to maintain a vital link to the

[30] It must also be said that a combination of camaraderie between Tallinn's successful church planters, their connections to the M4 church planting network, and strategic connections with international church planting actors have helped to 'pad the nest'.

[31] On porousness as a mark of baptistic identity, see Keith Jones, 'Gathering Worship: Some Tentative Proposals for Reshaping Worship in our European Baptistic Churches today', *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 13, no. 1 (2012), 5–27; and a rejoinder by Parush Parushev, 'Gathered, Gathering, Porous: Reflections on the Nature of Baptistic Community', *Baptistic Theologies*, 5, no. 1 (2013), 35–52.

resources their sponsors provide, and, by that means, contribute their successful innovations to the network. Our second test case, *strategic contraction*, has recently featured systemically across the EECB partnership network in response to the Covid-19 crisis. This crisis response is observable in the network when relationally active churches temporarily reassign their three nominations from a mix of local and disparate partners to very close partnerships nearer to home. The result is a visible increase in mutuality chains corroborated by higher-than-normal mutuality scores (a 20% increase between 2013 and 2020, see figure 5) and a consequent decrease in other measures of connection. This seems to indicate that in times of crisis, EECB churches which have accrued a relational network around them and developed some skill at navigating it will re-appropriate relational focus according to their needs. When a significant number of churches narrow their focus in the same way, the system appears to temporarily contract.

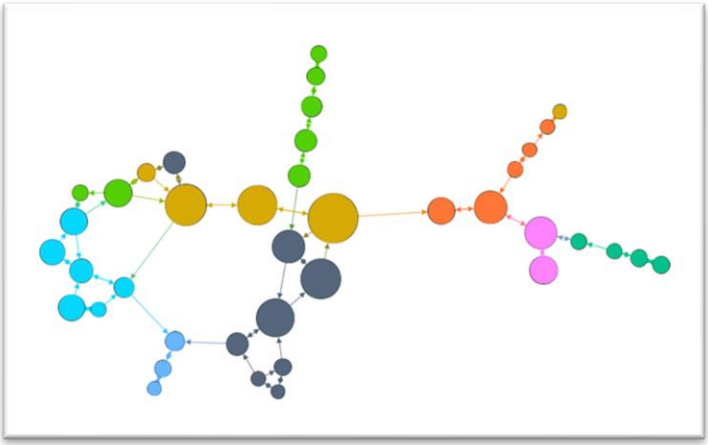

Figure 5: 2020 mutuality chains (20% increase from 2013).

Concluding Remarks: Caution, Promise, and the Sublime

This introduction must suffice to illustrate both the ongoing importance of interdependence in Estonia's EECB Union and the obvious explanatory strength of network analysis methods for relational ecclesiology. I believe that relational questions and relational modelling

will become increasingly important for ecclesiology in our ever-more networked, fluid, and viral world. As I have demonstrated, relational modelling of the EECB partnership network illuminates missional insights in a variety of settings at local, regional, and systemic levels. The insights and methods I have presented in this article are somewhat provisional and need to be tested and refined, but they demonstrate only a small fraction of the practicable wisdom that could be mined for the benefit of Christian gathered life and mission.

Despite all this potential, I acknowledge that some will baulk at this seemingly reductionistic approach to complex human relationships. I am sympathetic to this view as my theological interests are driven not by maps and statistics but by the content of our relationships and their potential to be swept up into the purposes of God's relational self. Paul Fiddes has demonstrated that beginning with relationship as the fundamental unit of divine society opens both our theology and practice to dynamic movement, radical openness, and an extended invitation for human beings to participate in, and be transformed by, divine communion.[32]

The real promise of network modelling for ecclesiology is not its predictive power but rather the invitation to reflect on the way relationships order and fill our worshipful 'long obedience'. Organisational scientist Starling Hunter has shown the way in which network analysis of movie scripts reveals how 'structure encodes meaning' even in the relationships between word pairs.[33] This deeply embedded structural meaning may only register subconsciously, but it leads viewers to engage actively with some films while finding others flat. Modelling brings these subterranean resonances to the surface, allowing the critic to analyse the film's artistry at the level of the felt-unseen. But modelling on its own could never approximate the artistry it describes. When structurally encoded meaning becomes an invitation

[32] Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God*. For an application of Fiddes' theological insights to the emerging field of relational sociology see my article, 'The Space Between: Considering the Church as a Relational Subject', *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 19, no. 2 (2019), 9–20.

[33] Starling Hunter, 'A Novel Method of Network Text Analysis', *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 4 (2014), 350–366.

for reflection and transformed practice, we can assert further that structural reflection refines and reifies culture.

I maintain that reflection on EECB congregational partnership has the potential to refine and reify the astounding in-tensioned fellowship our churches have inherited from previous generations. The process of recognising, reflecting on, and reifying the mundane miracle of interdependence is vital to both the missional success of the EECB Union in Estonia and to a full-bodied understanding of our unique contribution to baptistic identity. As Toivo Pilli has said, 'The fellowship and identity that the Union has attained — a commitment to unity while respecting differences — is not only a striking example of the value of consensus but carries a theological message of harmony exemplified in the Trinity to a world threatened by fragmentation.'[34]

[34] Pilli, *Usu Väärvid*, p. 15.

Creed as *Verbum Breviatum*

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Abstract:
This article is about what creed as such was taken to be in early Christianity. It was believed to be what Romans 9:28 terms as *verbum breviatum [Dei]*. As a summary of Scripture and Christian faith, it rested on the apostolic authority. Yet, in time, there came to be many different 'summaries of Scripture' and, consequently, a need for certain hermeneutical criteria became evident. Various problems which became apparent with the proliferation of different creeds contributed to the reasons why confessing creed(s) was later discontinued altogether in some churches. The aim of this article is to revive the early Christian perception of creeds and encourage the use of the universally accepted ancient creeds (i.e. the Apostles' Creed and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed) in the worship services of those churches which for one or another reason no longer confess them.

Keywords:
Creed; credal statements; Scripture; early Christianity; non-credalism

Introduction

No doubt, the perception of what a creed as such is taken to be has changed drastically over time. For various historical, theological, and ideological reasons (and at times, because of misunderstandings as well), not all contemporary Christian churches confess the most well-known ancient creeds (that is, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and/or the Apostles' Creed). Instead, and if at all, some Christians use various statements of faith of their own making — be these creeds, denominational confessions, church covenants, or other documents determining the theological identity of various associations and organisations.

It is well known that, due to a contrary understanding of Scripture and tradition, Luther wanted his theology to be based on *sola*

scriptura.[1] However, not every reformer had the same understanding of what this *sola* exactly excluded. To use an (over)simplified distinction, there were more inclusive understandings of *sola scriptura* (e.g. magisterial reformers: creeds were 'in', (medieval) tradition/canon law were 'out'[2]) and more exclusive understandings of *sola scriptura* (e.g. spiritualists and Collegiants: both creeds and (medieval) tradition/canon law were 'out'[3]). Perhaps the emergence and development of anti-credal/anti-confessional attitudes had their own good reasons, but these concerned more what creed had become in the eyes of the perceivers, rather than what it was meant to be from the very beginning.

What arguably happened was that the in itself scriptural distinction between 1) the God-breathed Scripture and 2) human laws/traditions (cf. 2 Tim 3:16; Matt 15:9; Mark 7:8–9; Col 2:8) was eventually turned into a mutually exclusive dichotomy and applied to various Christian texts.[4] While the *Belgic Confession* (1561) stated, 'We must not consider human writings […] nor councils, decrees, and

[1] Anna Vind, 'The *Solas* of the Reformation', in *Martin Luther in Context*, ed. by David M. Whitford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 267–71.

[2] Luther wrote, 'I believe the words of the Apostles' Creed to be the work of the Holy Ghost; the Holy Spirit alone could have enunciated things so grand, in terms so precise, so expressive, so powerful. No human creature could have done it, nor all the human creatures of ten thousand worlds. This creed, then, should be the constant object of our most serious attention. For myself, I cannot too highly admire or venerate it.' (*Martin Luther: Tabletalk,* trans. by William Hazlitt (London: Fount, 1995), p. 138 (§264)) The Apostles' Creed is accepted in Luther's *Small Catechism* 2 and *Large Catechism* 2 (1529), the *Anglican Catechism* (1549/1662), and Caspar Olevianus, *Exp. symb. Ap.* (1576); the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed in the *Marburg Articles* 1 (1529), *Augsburg Confession* 1.1 (1530), and the *Professio fidei Tridentinae* 1 (1564); and all three creeds (the Athanasian Creed included) in *Smalcald Articles* 1.4 (1537), *Formula of Concord* I (Epitome).3, the *Ten Articles* 1.1 (1536), the *French Confession* 5 (1559/1571), and in an early Baptist confession with an untypical name *The Orthodox Creed* 38 (1678).

[3] Generally speaking, Anabaptists were neither non- nor anti-credal (Karl Koop, *Anabaptist-Mennonite Confessions of Faith: The Development of a Tradition*, Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies (Kitchener: Pandora, 2003)). Some of them either accepted the Apostles' Creed (e.g. Balthasar Hübmaier, *A Christian Catechism* (1526) and Peter Riedemann, *Confession of Faith* (1543–1545)), or preferred their own confessions of faith (e.g., the *Schleitheim Articles* (1527)). Nevertheless, the issue of the normativity of creeds/confessions continued to be controversial among radical Protestants. 'Without any centralized ecclesial authority and without political approval, confessional statements depended on congregational assent' (Koop, *Anabaptist-Mennonite Confessions of Faith*, p. 75).

[4] See the *Ten Theses of Bern* 2 (1528); the Anabaptist Bernard Rothmann's 'Restitution' (1534); the *First Helvetic Confession* 1–4 (1536); and the *Geneva Confession* 1 (1536).

official decisions above the truth of God [i.e. Scripture]',[5] the *Declaration of the Congregational Union of England and Wales* (1833) announced that 'human traditions, fathers and councils, canons and *creeds* [emphasis mine], possess no authority over the faith and practice of Christians'.[6]

Generally speaking, these were not the reformers of the first generation, but certain later denominational leaders who turned away from the ancient creeds. When the Philadelphia Baptist Association published a confession of faith in 1742, some anti-credalists were horrified that Baptists, too, wrote confessions.[7] They 'could think of nothing nastier to say than to call it [the creed] a 'new Mary': "We need no such virgin Mary to come between us and God."'[8] In time, the sixteenth-century battle-cry *sola scriptura* developed into a slogan, 'No creed but the Bible!' as the founders of the Southern Baptist Convention stated in expressing their religious convictions in 1845.[9] How was it that the attitude towards creeds, including some of the most ancient, important, and almost universally accepted Christian statements of faith, changed so drastically?

This article is about what creed as such was taken to be in the period of late antiquity. It 'zooms in' on how creed was perceived by those who witnessed to its birth and development. More precisely, on

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[5] Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, eds, *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* 2 vols (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 2, 409; cf. *Savoy Declaration* 1.10 (1658). The *Bohemian Confession* of 1535 has a long Article 15 entitled 'On Human Traditions', and it mentions 'traditions, rites, customs, and Canons', but creeds are not in this list of despised items (Pelikan and Hotchkiss, *Creeds and Confessions*, 1, 824–26).

[6] Principles of Church Order and Discipline 2, *Bible Hub:* <https://biblehub.com/library/schaff/the_creeds_of_the_evangelical_protestant_churches/the_declaration_of_the_congregational.htm> [accessed 1 April 2021].

[7] See William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 2nd rev. edn (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2011).

[8] Timothy George, 'Evangelicals and the Mother of God', *First Things*, 179 (2007), 20–25 (p. 24b).

[9] 'The Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention, 8–12 May, 1845', *Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives:* <http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1845.pdf> [accessed 1 April 2021] (p. 19).
'Amnesia of and suspicion of tradition have been recurring problems in Baptist life' (Rhyne R. Putman, 'Baptists, *Sola Scriptura*, and the Place of the Christian Tradition', in *Baptists and Christian Tradition: Towards an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity*, ed. by Matthew Y. Emerson, Christopher W. Morgan, and R. Lucas Stamps (Nashville: B&G Academic, 2020), pp. 27–54 (p. 51)).

the basis of creeds (be those baptismal, declaratory, conciliar, or 'private'[10]), credal statements, patristic credal commentaries, and other documents,[11] this article first reconstructs the early Christian view of creed[12] and later assesses some of the complications with existing creeds which arguably led to the eventual abandonment of creeds in some churches. The goal is to facilitate a move — even if by a little — beyond the so-called 'cut-flower faith',[13] which seems to be quite widespread in current times. A 'cut-flower faith' no longer remembers its past, including what ancient creeds used to be and what they were for. It has no diachronic roots and consequently, has little sustaining energy.

The Birth of Credal Statements/Creeds

In the earliest Christian documents, which eventually became part of the canonical New Testament, one can encounter the idea that Christian faith was something received,[14] deposited,[15] and as such had to be

[10] Reservations about the unfortunate designation 'private creed' have been expressed in Tarmo Toom, 'Ulfila's Creedal Statement and Its Theology', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 29, no. 4 (2021), 525–552, and Christoph Markschies, 'On Classifying Creed the Classical German Way: "Privat-Bekenntnisse" ("Private Creeds")', *Studia Patristica,* 63, no. 11 (2013), 259–71.

[11] Apart from patristic credal commentaries, homilies, and conciliar *acta*, the data is largely taken from a multi-lingual, four-volume reference work: Wolfram Kinzig, ed., *Faith in Formulae: A Collection of Early Christian Creeds and Creed-Related Texts*, Oxford Early Christian Texts, 4 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) (hereafter Kinzig, §x). A fascinating list of more than 200 largely unstudied early medieval texts concerning credal faith is available in Susan A. Keefe, *A Catalogue of Works Pertaining to the Explanation of the Creed in Carolingian Manuscripts*, Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia 63 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012).

[12] Despite all similarities, the provenance of the interrogatory, declaratory, and conciliar creeds was clearly different, and the provenance of eastern and western creeds was likewise somewhat different, but the focus of this article is not on the provenance and differences, but on the patristic perception of creeds in general.

[13] This is a phrase of Ronald Heine, *Reading the Old Testament with the Ancient Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 11.

[14] Rom 6:17; 1 Cor 11:23, 15:1; Gal 1:11–12; 2 Thess 2:15; Jude 3.

[15] 1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:14; 2 Pet 2:21; Jude 3. Acts 16:4 contends that Paul and Silas handed over (*paradidōmi*) the dogmas (*dogmata*). Origen too pointed out that 'the holy apostles, in preaching the faith of Christ, delivered with utmost clarity to all believers […] certain points that they believed to be necessary' (*PArch*. Preaf. 3 in *Origen: On the First Principles*, trans. by John Behr, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), vol. 1, p. 13).

guarded carefully.[16] That is how the apostles — Peter, Paul, John, and others — understood their faith.

There were some attempts to summarise this faith, this received and deposited apostolic *kerygma,* and hence there are various credal statements in the would-be canonical New Testament.[17] Some of these credal statements were linked with baptism.[18] As this rite of initiation developed, a candidate was asked several questions, and with the help of some scriptural statements, the candidate confessed their Christian faith.[19] Later, these interrogatory baptismal creeds, together with catechetical instructions (especially the rites of *traditio* and *redditio symboli*),[20] and the existing 'rules of faith',[21] became the basis for the declaratory and conciliar creeds.[22] Thus, although starting to emerge in

16 Gal 1:6–9, 2:4–8; Col 2:7–8; 2 Tim 1:14; 1 John 2:22; 2 John 1:7.

17 Heb 4:14 says, 'Let us hold fast to our confession (*tēs homologias*)' (cf. 3:1, 10:23; 2 Cor 9:13; 1 Tim 6:12–13; 1 John 4:14–15). Rom 10:10 ('with the mouth one confesses (*stomati de homologeitai*)') is referred to by several later homilies on creed (e.g. Augustine, *F. et symb.* 1.1; *s.* 241.1; 398.1; Peter Chrysologus, *s.* 56.5). Kelly assesses, 'There is plenty of evidence in the New Testament to show that the faith was already beginning to harden into conventional summaries' (John N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd edn (New York: Longman, 1972), p. 13). For the credal statements in the New Testament, see Kinzig, *Faith in Formulae*, vol. 1, pp. 35–60; Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, pp. 14–23; Pelikan and Hotchkiss, *Creeds and Confessions*, vol. 1, pp. 32–36. It is unlikely that any of the confessional statements in the Hebrew Scriptures, including Deut 6:4 or 26:5–9, belonged to a literary genre of a creed (Kinzig, *Faith in Formulae*, vol. 1, pp. 33–34). That is, ancient Israelites did not have sets of multi-clausal creeds or credal statements.

18 Acts 8:36–38 (textual evidence for verse 37 is not found in $\mathfrak{p}^{45}$; ℵ, A, B, C, 33, etc. (Bruce M. Metzger, *The Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: United Bible Society, 1971), pp. 359-60); Acts 16:31–33, 19:4–5. See Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, pp. 30–52.

19 Although both formulas continued to be used, the shift from 'I believe' to 'we believe' came with the emergence of declaratory creeds in the fourth century (Kinzig, *Faith in Formulae*, vol. 1, p. 9, n. 45).

20 Thomas M. Finn, 'Introduction' to *Quodvultdeus of Carthage: The Creedal Homilies*, ACW 60 (New York: Newman, 2004), pp. 3–10.

21 *Regula fidei* was a free-worded summary of Christian faith, often with a tripartite structure (no doubt, in conformity with Matt 28:19). These informal accounts of what was 'taught by Christ' (Tertullian, *Praesc. haer.* 13) circulated in apologetic and polemical contexts, and continued to exist after creeds had emerged. Just as several gospels were, in a sense, one gospel, so were several and differently worded rules of faith. Edwards compares these early 'improvised confessions' (i.e. rules of faith) to a homily, as they repeat 'the same fundamental truths in sermon after sermon without exact repetition or startling innovation' (Mark Edwards, 'Kinzig on the Creeds', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* 70, no. 1 (2019), 119–29 (pp. 120–21)).

22 A convenient multilingual (Greek, Latin, English) collection of documents, including creeds and credal statements from ecumenical councils are Pelikan and Hotchkiss, *Creeds and Confessions*,

the second century, creeds, in the proper sense of the word (that is, declarative creeds), were a phenomenon of the fourth century. However, and as already stated above, this article is not about the historical origin and development of creed(s).[23] Rather and again, it is about what creeds were taken to be, about their perceived religious origin.

Incentives for Abbreviation

The dossier which included the documents of the emerging Christian faith included gospels, collection(s) of the letters of Paul, and other writings. But how was one to express in a nutshell the 'good news' as such, which was found in these sets of documents?

In several credal statements, the Old Latin text of Romans 9:28 ('Completing his word, and abbreviating it equitably, for the Lord will make a brief word (*verbum breviatum*[24]) upon the earth') was invoked for justifying the making of short summaries of the Christian faith.[25] In *De Incarnatione* 6.4, John Cassian elaborated,

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vol. 1, pp. 155–241, and according to the Roman Catholic counting, Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990).

[23] For various positions, see Everett Ferguson, 'Creeds, Councils, and Canons', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. by Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 427–45 (pp. 427–34); Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, pp. 30–130; Wolfram Kinzig, 'The Origins of the Roman Creed: New Reflections on an Old Problem', in *The Bible and the Creed*, ed. by Markus Bockmuehl (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming 2022); Wolfram Kinzig and Markus Vinzent, 'Recent Research on the Origin of the Creed', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 50, no. 2 (1999), 534–59; Adolf M. Ritter, 'Creeds', in *Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to AD 600*, ed. by Ian Hazlett (Nashville: Abington, 1991), pp. 92–100; Markus Vinzent, 'Die Entstehung des "Römischen Glaubensbekenntnises"', in *Tauffragen und Bekenntnis: Studien zur sogenannten 'Traditio apostolica' zu den 'Interrogationes de fide' und zum 'Römischen Glaubensbekenntnis'*, ed. by Wolfram Kinzig, Christoph Markschies, and Vinzent Markus, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 74 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), pp. 245–409; Liuwe H. Westra, *The Apostles' Creed: Origin, History, and Some Early Commentaries*, Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), pp. 21–72.

[24] Some Greek manuscripts, too, add *logon suntetmēmenon* from Isa 10:23 LXX to Rom 9:28.

[25] Origen, *Comm. Rm.* 7.19.3; Anonymous, *Exp. symb.* 3; *Coll. Eus. Hom.* 9.1 (Kinzig, §30); an anonymous fifth-century *Tract. sym.* 6 (Westra, *The Apostles' Creed*, p. 470); Isidore of Seville, *Sent.* 1.22.1 adds Isa 28:22, 'I have heard from the Lord God of hosts an abbreviation (*abbreviationem*) upon the earth' (Kinzig, §39c).

> This [i.e. the Apostles' Creed], therefore, is the 'short word (*breviatum verbum*)' which the Lord made, assembling in a few words the faith of both of his testaments, enclosing the meaning of all Scripture in a few brief clauses, constructing his own [creed] out of his own [Scriptures], and rendering the force of the whole law in a most abbreviated and brief formula.[26]

Furthermore, in Matthew 22:37–39, Jesus himself summed up, or abbreviated, the Law into a double commandment of loving God and neighbour. Obviously, such abbreviation was thereby no less authoritative and 'scriptural' than the whole and unabbreviated Law. Thus, the idea/phrase of *verbum breviatum* from Romans 9:28, combined with Jesus's own example, seemed to warrant the making of summaries of Christian faith; that is, creeds.[27]

There were also practical reasons for composing brief memorable statements, or 'one-liners' of faith — illiteracy and lack of opportunity. One of the earliest figures (ca 350 CE) to attest to the existence of a declaratory creed, Cyril of Jerusalem, explained,

> Acquire and observe only [the faith] which is now delivered to you [i.e. the candidates] by the church [and] which has been fortified from all the Scriptures. For, since not everyone is able to read the Scriptures, some being hindered from knowledge by ignorance, and others by want of leisure, we encompass the entire teaching of the faith in a few lines, lest [someone's] soul perish from ignorance.[28]

In order to make sure that everyone understood the short creed (when Latin was no longer a universal vernacular in the West), Haito of Basle mentioned the requirement of learning the Apostles' Creed (and the Lord's Prayer) 'both in Latin and in the vernacular so that what they profess with the mouth might be believed in the heart and understood'.[29]

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[26] Kinzig, §21.

[27] These two reasons are explicitly mentioned together in Fulgentius of Ruspe, *C. Fab.* 36.1 (Kinzig, §35) and Theodulf of Orleans, *Lib. ord. bapt.* 6.5 (Kinzig, §50).

[28] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cath.* 5.12 (Kinzig, §624a); cf. Niceta of Remesiana, *Sym.* 13; Isidore of Seville, *Eccl. off.* 23.5 (Kinzig, §39a). Augustine too expressed the idea that creed is meant for those initiates who 'have yet to be strengthened by a detailed spiritual study and knowledge of the divine Scriptures' (*F. et symb.* 1.1 [*On Christian Belief*], trans. by Michael G. Campbell, WSA I/8 (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2012), p. 151).

[29] Haito of Basle, *Cap.* 2 (Kinzig, §747a).

Creed as a Summary of Christian Faith/Scripture

Having some very good reasons for coming up with abbreviations of Christian proclamation, early Christians believed that such abbreviations, that is, creeds and credal statements, were indeed nothing but 'digests' of the apostolic *kerygma*.

One of the main meanings of the word *symbolon/symbolum* is a summary of Christian faith,[30] and enforcing this meaning is a recurring theme in patristic literature. For example, Peter Chrysologus taught that the creed was a 'summary of our faith', and it concerned 'the whole mystery of human salvation';[31] Fulgentius of Ruspe assured his readers that 'a *symbolum* is […] a kind of true treaty and a true collection in which the totality of all the Christian faith is briefly established';[32] bishops at the Council of Ephesus believed that the Creed of Nicaea contained 'in a few words all that the divine Scriptures have handed down to us concerning religion';[33] and Isidore of Seville summed up this idea with the words, 'the whole breadth of Scripture is summed up […] in the brevity of this creed'.[34]

This means that it was not even thinkable that a baptismal creed confessed something other than, or contrary to, Scripture. Again, patristic authors of all persuasions were quite convinced that what the creed said briefly was what Scripture said in many words and consequently, the scriptural distinction between the God-breathed Scripture and 'human traditions' just did not and could not apply to the traditional creed(s).

One should notice here that although there are credal statements in the New Testament, there are almost no statements on Scripture in

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[30] Rufinus, *Exp. sym.* 2; Augustine, *s.* 212.1, *s.* 213.2, *s.* 214.12; Peter Chrysologus, *s.* 27.16; Ps.-Maximus of Turin, *Hom.* 83 (Kinzig, §23). For the various meanings of the word *symbolon*, see Kinzig, §1–80 and Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, pp. 52–61.

[31] Peter Chrysologus, *s.* 56.4 (Harold W. Moore, 'The Baptismal Creed of St. Peter Chrysologus: A Translation of Seven Sermons of St. Peter Chrysologus on the Creed' (STL thesis, St. Mary's Seminary, Baltimore, 1950), p. 10).

[32] Fulgentius of Ruspe, *C. Fab.* 36.2 (Kinzig, §35); cf. *Fid. trin.* 4 (Kinzig, §29); Jerome, *C. Io. Hier.* 28 (Kinzig §17); Augustine, *s.* 213.2.

[33] Kinzig, §205.

[34] Isidore of Seville, *Sent.* 1.22.2 (Kinzig, §39c).

ancient creeds. That is, with just a few marginal exceptions, early Christian creeds and credal statements did not include a clause on Scripture. The most obvious reason is that credal statements/rules of faith and canonical Scripture were taken to be largely coterminous. Creeds said what Scripture said, only much more briefly.[35] It was the sixteenth-/seventeenth-century denominational confessions which started to elaborate on Scripture as an article, or better, as the first article of faith in their confessional statements.[36] It was believed that while a creed could have a clause about Scripture, a creed itself was no longer considered to be a *verbum breviatum [Dei]*.

To compose a more-or-less exhaustive list of (extant) quotations supporting the idea that creed is a summary of Scripture would be too long and tedious, but a good number of examples may hammer the point home securely. (Readers should notice here that this conviction was shared by 'orthodox' and 'heretical' theologians alike.)

Sending his creed to Pope Julius,[37] Marcellus claimed that it represented his faith 'which I learned and was taught out of the holy Scripture'.[38] Cyril of Jerusalem preached about creed:

> For the articles of the faith were not composed as seemed good to men,[39] but the most important points were gathered together from all the Scripture and make up one complete teaching of the faith. Just as the mustard seed in one small grain contains many branches, so also this faith [i.e. the creed] has

[35] To cite a Baptist scholar, treating 'the Bible in isolation from the tradition of the church, as it was located in the ancient Rule of Faith, baptismal confessions, and conciliar creeds, would have been incomprehensible to the Christian pastors and thinkers of the patristic age' (Daniel H. Williams, ed., *Tradition, Scripture, and Interpretation: A Sourcebook of the Ancient Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), p. 17).

[36] This was typical of the Reformed confessions: the *First Helvetic Confession* 1–4 (1536); the *Geneva Confession* 1 (1536); the *Second Helvetic Confession* 1.1–9 (1566), the *Irish Articles* 1–7 (1615), and the *Westminster Confession of Faith* 1.1–10 (1647). Pelikan observes, 'The authority of Scripture eventually came to be seen […] as the doctrine that underlay and authenticated all other doctrines' (Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo*: *Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 137).

[37] Although in Greek, Marcellus's creed is the earliest extant example of the declaratory Apostles' Creed.

[38] Marcellus, *Ep. Iul.* in Epiphanius, *Pan*. 72.2–3 (Frank Williams, ed., *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis/Book II and III [Sections 47–80, De Fide]*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 36 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), p. 424).

[39] One should notice Cyril's explicit rejection of the idea that creeds were mere 'human traditions'.

> encompassed all the knowledge of godliness in the Old and New [Testaments] in a few words.[40]

Rufinus contended that for each article in the creed 'keen researchers will find a vast ocean of testimony […] in Holy Scriptures'.[41] After all, the creed was constructed 'out of the living stones and pearls supplied by the Lord'.[42] Theodore of Mopsuestia was adamant that 'the words of the [Nicene] creed contain nothing but an explanation and interpretation of the words found in the teaching of our Lord'.[43] Augustine joined in (having a variant of the Apostles' Creed, the Creed of Milan, in mind) stating that 'the words which you have heard [in the creed] are scattered throughout the divine Scriptures', and 'everything that you are going to hear in the symbol is already contained in the divine documents of the holy scriptures'.[44] And an eighth-century gospel codex (E, 07) included the creed at the very end of its text; that is, as something that concluded or summed up the text of the gospels!

To continue the same point, but with examples which concern particular teachings, an Armenian fragment put it this way (as if listing the most incredible elements): 'The Law, the Prophets, and the Gospels have proclaimed that Christ was born of a virgin, passible upon the cross, visible from among the dead, and that he ascended into the heavens and was glorified by the Father and is King forever.'[45] The Macrostich Creed attempted to limit credal statements to only what could explicitly be found in Scripture, 'for neither is it safe to say that the Son is from nothing (since this is nowhere spoken of him in the

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[40] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cath.* 5.12 (Kinzig, §624a); cf. Boethius, *Fid. cath.* 2 (Kinzig, §458).

[41] Rufinus of Aquileia, *Exp. symb.* 18 (*Rufinus: A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed,* trans. by John N. D. Kelly, ACW 20 (New York: Newman, 1955), p. 53). Or, to put it the other way around, 'If we search both the Old and New Testament Scriptures we find nothing about God beyond [what is contained in] the creed' (Etherius of Osma, *Adv. Elip.* 1.87 (Kinzig, §45)).

[42] Rufinus, *Exp. symb.* 2. Niceta of Remesiana likewise claimed that the words of the creed were 'selected from the whole Scripture and put together for the sake of brevity, they are like precious gems making a single crown' (*Exp. symb.* 13, *Niceta of Remesiana*, trans. by Gerald G. Walsh, FC 7 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1949), p. 53).

[43] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Comm. sym.* 10 (Alphonse Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Nicene Creed*, Woodbrooke Studies 5 (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009; first published 1932), p. 111).

[44] Augustine, *s.* 398.1 and 212.2. (*Sermons*, trans. by Edmund Hill, WSA III/10 (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1995), p. 455 and WSA III/6 (1990), p. 138).

[45] Kinzig, §109c1.

divinely inspired Scriptures)'.[46] Quodvultdeus, in discussing the issue of the full divinity of the Son, said, 'Let us demonstrate from the Scriptures that the Son is called omnipotent just as the Father is.'[47]

In addition to the explicit quotes about the creed being a drastically shortened Scripture, there was a telling phenomenon in which individual articles of faith were stated pretty much as a chain (*catena*) of scriptural phrases or verses.[48] At this point, I would like to provide an illustrative chart in which credal clauses are matched with Scripture (figure 1). It concerns one of the earliest declaratory creeds in Latin (381–382 CE) in *Liber ad Damasum Episcopum* (*Tract.* 2.47–67) of Priscillian of Avila.[49] The clauses in his creed were 'enforced' by supporting scriptural quotes, which were introduced by a formula 'as is written (*sicut scribtum est*)'.[50]

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46 Kinzig, §145.

47 Quodvultdeus, *Hom.* 1.7 (*Quodvultdeus of Carthage: The Credal Homilies*, trans. by Thomas Finn, ACW 60 (New York: Newman, 2004), p. 30).

48 (Pseudo-)Ignatius, *Ep. Phil.* 1.1–3.3 (Kinzig, §98g); *Epist. Ap.* 3 (Kinzig, §103a); Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.22.1 (Kinzig, §109b4). Similar examples can be found from later dates and from as theologically different creeds as the Christological section in a creed from the Council of Antioch (Kinzig, §141a), the First Creed of Sirmium (Kinzig, §148), and Gregory of Nyssa, *Ref. Eun.* 18–19 (Kinzig, §187). Many post-Reformation denominational creeds/confessions continued the tradition of confessing their faith mostly with the help of scriptural phrases which were organised according to the respective theological convictions.

49 See Tarmo Toom, 'Marcellus of Ancyra, Priscillian of Avila: Their Theologies and Creeds', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 68, no. 1 (2014), 60–81.

50 A similar chart where the clauses of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed are matched with Scripture can be found in the Appendix of Williams, *Tradition, Scripture, and Interpretation*, pp. 185–86. Priscillian's creed as set out in figure 1 is as follows: '(Believing) in one God, the Father Almighty, and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, buried, on the third day arose again, ascended into the heavens, is seated on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, whence he will come and judge the living and the dead, (believing) the holy church, the Holy Spirit, the saving baptism, (believing) in the remission of sins, (believing) in the resurrection of the flesh.' Derived from *Priscillian of Avila: The Complete Works*, trans. by Marco Conti, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 71–3. I have added a reference to Acts 1:9 in line 6 of figure 1.

The Creed of Priscillian of Avila
(Credentes) unum Deum Patrem omnipotentem (1 Cor 8:6)
et unum dominum Iesum Christum (1 Cor 8:6)
natum ex Maria virgine ex Spiritu sancto (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23; Lk 1:35)
passum sub Pontio Pilato crucifixum (Isa 53:12; Luke 22:37)
sepultum, tertia die resurrexisse (Zeph 3:8)
ascendisse in caelos (Acts 1:9)
sedere ad dexteram Dei Patris omnipotentis (Acts 7:55)
inde venturum et iudicaturum de vivis et mortuis (Acts 11:1)
(credentes) in sanctam ecclesiam
sanctum Spiritum
baptismum salutare (John 3:5)
(credentes) remissionem peccatorum (1 John 2:12)
(credentes) in resurrectionem carnis (Exod 3:6; Matt 22:31–2; Luke 20:38)

Figure 1: The creed of Priscillian of Avila (created by the author on the basis of Marco Conti; see footnote 50)

Furthermore, eastern creeds often employed the phrase 'according to Scripture', although they attached this phrase to various articles of faith: to the Father begetting the Son,[51] Jesus Christ,[52] the incarnation,[53] virgin birth,[54] the full divinity of the Holy Spirit,[55]

51 The Fourth Creed of Sirmium (Kinzig, §157); the Creed of Niké (Kinzig, §159a); the Creed of Constantinople (360) (Kinzig, §160).
52 The creed of the deposed bishop Macarius of Antioch at the Third Council of Constantinople (Kinzig, §242a).
53 Gregory Thaumaturgos about the Council of Ephesus, *Coll. Vat.* 170 (Kinzig, §118).
54 Athanasius, *Syn.* 24.3 (Kinzig, §141a); the 'Dedication Creed' (Kinzig, §141b).
55 (Pseudo-)Liberius, *Ep. Ath.* 2 (Kinzig, §165).

resurrection of the flesh,[56] and even angels.[57]As is well known, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed says 'according to Scripture' only in connection with the clause 'on the third day he rose' (no doubt because of 1 Cor 15:4).[58] However, while the variant from the second session of the council includes this phrase,[59] the one from the fifth session does not. Accordingly, those Latin translations which follow the second session include the phrase 'according to Scripture', and those that follow the fifth session, do not.[60]

To conclude this (lengthy) point, in order to secure the belief that a creed as such was indeed the *verbum breviatum*, at times its clauses, words, and even grammatical constructions were taken from Scripture. For example, creeds usually said, 'We believe *in* . . .' rather than 'We believe *that* . . .' The formula 'believing in (*eis*) someone/something' was a phrase taken directly from the New Testament.[61] In the Latin-speaking world, 'believing in (*in*)' plus ablative became a special feature of the Apostles' Creed. Although there are credal examples which use the preposition 'in' in front of every clause,[62] Rufinus made a forceful case that only the clauses about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit should have the preposition 'in'.[63] An Augustinian sermon (244), too, put it succinctly, 'Believe in the Holy Spirit, believe the holy church'.[64] Faustus of Riez argued in similar vein. Coming to the clause about the church, he asked his opponents, 'Why do you try to produce a thick fog by

[56] (Pseudo-)Athanasius, *Ep. Lib.* 8 (Kinzig, §150).
[57] John II of Jerusalem, *C. Io. Hier.* 15 (Kinzig, §190a2).
[58] Kinzig, §184e1; cf. Basil of Caesarea, *Fid.* 8 (Kinzig, §174f).
[59] Evidently because the earliest version of the *acta* (*veriso antiqua*) links the creed with the third session, Kinzig consistently follows this tradition. However, and as a matter of fact, the creed was reported in the second session (*The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon: Volume 2*, trans. by Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, Translated Texts for Historians 45 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), vol. 2, pp. 12–13).
[60] Kinzig, §184, I.1–16, and II.17–16, 28–31.
[61] Kinzig, *Faith in Formulae*, vol. 1, pp. 36–41.
[62] Anonymous, *Tract. symb.* (Westra, *The Apostles' Creed*, p. 365).
[63] Rufinus, *Exp. symb.* 36. See Liuwe H. Westra, 'Creating a Theological Difference: The Myth of Two Grammatical Constructions with Latin *Credo*', *Studia Patristica*, 92, no. 18 (2017), 3–14; Henri de Lubac, *The Christian Faith*, trans. by Richard Arnandez (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), pp. 133–43. Nevertheless, it did not become a consistent feature in all Latin creeds.
[64] Kinzig, §269.

adding a small syllable; that is "in" [to the other clauses]?'[65] In *Carmen* 11.1.36, Venantius Fortunatus elucidated, 'Where we use the preposition *in*, we recognise the divinity.'[66]

In summary, creeds were taken to be the abbreviations of Christian faith/Scripture, although every abbreviation inevitably was and is someone's deliberate selection and editing.

The Apostolic Authority

One ingenious way of demonstrating the authenticity of what was later called the Apostles' Creed was to connect it directly with the apostles before they went their own ways. In the Middle Ages, there was even a Feast of the Dispersion of the Apostles.[67]

In *Expositio symboli* 2,[68] Rufinus tells the story of how the twelve apostles, before departing from each other and going into the wide world to proclaim the gospel, agreed on the 'fixed standard' or 'brief token' (i.e. a creed) for securing the unity of their preaching.[69] Each apostle was said to have contributed one of the credal clauses and consequently, there are twelve clauses in the Apostles' Creed (although there was no consensus about how exactly the structurally Trinitarian Apostles' Creed divided into twelve clauses).[70] As a result, in later

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[65] Faustus of Riez, *Spir. sanct.* 1.2 (Kinzig, §267b2); cf. *Inter. Fid.* (Kinzig, §605) and Pseudo-Maximus of Turin, *Hom.* 83 (Kinzig, §607).

[66] Monumenta Germaniae Historica 4.1 (Berlin: Weidemann, 1881), p. 257.

[67] De Lubac, *The Christian Faith*, p. 36. De Lubac provides a wonderful summary of the story of the twelve apostles providing the Apostles' Creed on pp. 19–53.

[68] A slightly earlier version of this story is found in an anonymous *Exp. sym.* 3; cf. *Const. Ap.* 6.14 (Kinzig, §182b).

[69] This story is echoed in many documents with ever greater details, such as, Anonymous, *S. symb.* 3 (Kinzig, § 27b); Anonymous, *Exp. symb.* 1 (Kinzig, §31); Isidore of Seville, *Orig. off.* 1.23.2 and 5 (Kinzig, §39a); *S. symb. trad.* (Kinzig, §47); Anonymous, *Exp. bapt.* 3 (Kinzig, §63); *Coll. duo. lib.* (Kinzig, §528).

[70] Cf. Anonymous, *Exp. s. symb.* 1 (Kinzig, §33); Anonymous, *Exp. symb.* (Kinzig, §48); *Ap. symb.* (Kinzig, §263); Maximus of Turin, *s.* 52.2 (Kinzig, §355); Leo, *ep.* 4b.4 (Kinzig, §360); Etherius of Osma, *Adv. Elip.* 2.99 (Kinzig, §380). The Trinitarian Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed was likewise divided in several ways, from two main sections to thirty-eight individual clauses (Mart Jaanson, 'Nikaia-Konstantinoopoli usutunnistuse ladinakeelse normteksti grammatiline, teoloogiline ja muusikaline liigendamine' (doctoral thesis, Tartu University; Dissertationes theologiae universitatis Tartuensis 30, Tartu: Tartu ülikooli kirjastus, 2014), pp. 141–74). A

imagination, and although it varied quite a bit, particular clauses were attributed to particular apostles.[71] The list usually starts with Peter and ends with Matthias or Thomas. At times, the Apostle Paul is included as well.[72]

The Triplex Sacramentary of Zürich claims that 'the apostles, upon suddenly hearing a sound from the heavens, received the symbol of the one faith and handed the glory of your gospel over to all nations in various languages',[73] but the strict historicity of such a story is obviously a moot point. John Kelly assesses, 'Taken literally, the story is unacceptable, although its thesis that the contents of the Church's creed have the authority of the Apostles behind them is solidly based.'[74] The given story is 'an uncritical elaboration of the conviction' that creed as such was/is apostolic.[75]

And this is precisely what counts for the current investigation: the belief that credal clauses somehow extended back to the apostles, many of whom also authored several books of the canonical New Testament. For the third time, it follows that, in its essence, a creed could not have been anything alien, contradictory to the apostolic *kerygma*, and imposed upon Christians by institutional power structures.[76]

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wonderful tool for finding the 'twelve clauses' of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed in various creeds/confessional statements is the Creedal Syndogmaticon in Pelikan's *Credo*, pp. 538–70 (also found in the end of all volumes of the *Creeds and Confessions*).

[71] See Kinzig, §§364, 373–9, 382–410, plus various later variations. A unique chart is found in an early fifteenth-century manuscript, where the credal clauses, which are attributed to the twelve apostles, are matched with the fulfilled Old Testament prophecies (Kinzig, §428).

[72] Anonymous, *Exp. s. symb.* (Kinzig, §277); a creed in Codex Laon (Kinzig, §420).

[73] Kinzig, §417.

[74] Kelly, *Rufinus*, p. 101, n. 7.

[75] Ibid.

[76] This is not to deny the later imperial imposition of various creeds and credal statements, starting with Emperor Constantius (Hilary, *Coll. Ar.* A VIII), the laws in *Codex Theodosianus* (Kinzig, §§532–536), Justinian's edict (Kinzig, §556), the ruling of the Synod of Soissons (Kinzig, §586), John of Biclaro, *Chron.* 2 (Kinzig, §689), and Charlemagne, *Cap. Gen.* 14 (and frag. 2) (Kinzig, §§734–735), but rather to highlight the conviction that creeds derived from the apostles/bishops and not from emperors.

Alternatively, and more accurately in the historical sense,[77] according to *Homilia* 9.1 in *Collectio Eusebiana*, it is said to be the 'Church Fathers (*ecclesiarum patres*)' who put together the 'salvific compendium of few words' by separating 'the greatest things in the holy Scriptures from the great things [therein]'.[78] As a result, the creed was compared to 'one single pouch' that carried the greatest treasures.[79] The text continues,

> Out of concern for the salvation of the nations, they [i.e. the fathers of the church] collected testimonies, laden with divine mysteries, from various books of the Scriptures […] assembled short and clear expressions […] and called this collection a *symbolum*. Thus, a single precious collection was made from the canonical texts, thrifty with words, but rich in meaning, and the power of the entire corpus of each testament was poured into a few phrases.[80]

As one can see, the creed was perceived to be traditional in the best sense of this word, extending back to the fathers and ultimately to their predecessors — the apostles, the writers of the books of the New Testament.

The Divine Authority?

In order to affirm the apostolic, in fact the divine, provenance of the Christian/apostolic *kerygma* (Gal 1:11–12; 1 Cor 11:23), an even stronger claim was to assert that, just like Scripture, the creed was inspired.[81] The logic here was that a summary of the inspired Scripture was as inspired as Scripture itself. Hence its divine authority . . . and here, perhaps, many make the decision to not read this article any further.

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[77] For the positions of modern credal scholars on the time and origin of the Apostles' Creed, see Markus Vinzent, *Der Ursprung des Apostolikums in Urteil der kritischen Forschung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), pp. 60–83.

[78] Kinzig, §30. The bishops at Chalcedon emphasised likewise that the faith confessed by the creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople was that of the 'fathers' (Price and Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, vol. 2, pp. 10–13). Statements like these may indicate 'a certain critical resistance to the legend' (De Lubac, *The Christian Faith*, p. 29).

[79] Kinzig, §30.

[80] Ibid.; cf. Pseudo-Faustus of Riez, *s.* 2 (Kinzig, §34).

[81] This is stated in univocal terms in Etherius of Osma and Beatus of Liébana, *Adv. Elip.* 1.87 (Kinzig, §45); *S. symb. trad.* (Kinzig, §47); Anonymous, *Exp. bapt.* 3 (Kinzig, §63); Anonymous, *Exp. symb.* 1 (Kinzig, §74); a creed of the Synod of Autun (Kinzig, §581).

Nevertheless, Pope Leo knew that the 'evangelical creed' was 'inspired by the Lord [and] instituted by the apostles […] and not made by human expression of wisdom'.[82] Faustinus maintained that 'our fathers in Nicaea wrote with the force of the Holy Spirit'.[83] The Creed of an Alexandrine apocrisiarius claimed, in turn, that the confessional statements of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus were 'evangelical and apostolic proclamations, which by the divine inspiration contains the only true and orthodox faith'.[84] In his instructions to the Council of Constantinople in 448 CE, Emperor Theodosius II wrote that 'the creed was proclaimed correctly and under divine inspiration by our fathers, the 318 [fathers] who convened at Nicaea'.[85]

Again, the argument in this article is not that the divine inspiration of creeds was or is a self-evident and settled matter; one can only point out that this was the prevalent conviction in the early church. And such conviction is yet another indicator that the fathers just did not operate with the distinction between the God-breathed Scripture and supposedly 'human-made' creeds.[86] For them, Scripture and creed were basically the same thing in a different format. Or, as the early twentieth-century poet-theologian Charles Williams once said, the Christian faith 'had become a Creed, and it remained a Gospel'.[87]

Things Get Complicated

Despite being regarded as summaries of apostolic teachings/Scripture,

[82] Leo, *Tract.* 98 (Kinzig, §255g).
[83] Faustinus, *Lib. prec.* 3 (Kinzig, §354).
[84] *Coll. Avel.* 10 (Kinzig, §220).
[85] Kinzig, §538; cf. Pope Vigilius, *ep.* 15 (Kinzig, §444); the creed of Tarasius (Kinzig, §245c).
[86] As this article is appearing in the *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, it should be mentioned that the articles in a special edition of *Review and Expositor* entitled 'Baptist Confessions of Faith' presuppose a fundamental distinction between Scripture and creeds. That is, post-Reformation denominational creeds are not taken to be *verbum breviatum [Dei]* (and perhaps rightly so) and consequently, it makes sense to speak about 'the higher authority of the Bible' (James L. Garrett, 'Biblical Authority According to Baptist Confessions of Faith', *Review and Expositor*, 76, no. 1 (1979), 43–54 (pp. 43–44)). But what does not make much sense is applying this distinction to the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.
[87] Charles Williams, *The Descent of the Dove: A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church* (London: Longmans & Green, 1939), p. 37.

there were several complications with creeds, which in turn contributed to the eventual abandonment of them by at least some later Christians. To begin with, there were many different creeds, and many different creeds with contradictory theologies,[88] although all of them appealed to apostolic authority.[89] Moreover, both religious and secular power-structures started determining the acceptance and the right interpretation of creeds. Consequently, something which was intended to be the instrument of unity, at times turned out to be the instrument of division and exclusion.

Church fathers were obviously very much aware of the fact that, by the end of the fourth century, there were many contradictory creeds to choose from. Apparently, Scripture could be summarised in various ways. Early on, Irenaeus was aggravated that Gnostics 'try to draw their proof not only from the Gospels and the writing of the apostles, changing the interpretations and twisting the exegesis, but also from the law and the prophets'.[90] Tertullian was worried that, as his heretical opponents formed their opinions from Scripture, it merely created the deceptive aura of being scriptural.[91] An encyclical letter to the bishops of Egypt cautioned, 'For even though they [i.e. the "Eusebians"] may write with phrases from the Scriptures, do not endure their writing!'[92]

After all, there were such things as 'heretical creeds'.[93] When various drafts of the creed were presented to bishops at the Council of

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[88] Hilary lamented (and primarily, he had the conciliar creeds of the post-Nicene period in mind) that 'after custom began to create new things, rather than holding to what was accepted', the inevitable result was the plurality of creeds, which no longer followed the gospels but the spirit of the time (Hilary, *Lib. Const.* 4.3 (Kinzig, §151e1)). That is, the existing creeds no longer confessed the traditional beliefs, but introduced theological 'novelties'.

[89] The alternative traditions too claimed to rest on apostolic witness. Ptolemy contended that his teaching was backed up with direct ties to the apostles (*Ep. Fl.* 7.9), and a fourth-century apocryphal *The History of Simon Cephas, the Chief of the Apostles* 5.2 claimed that 'the true teaching was with them [i.e. with the apostles]' (Tony Burke and Brent Landau, eds, *New Apocrypha: More Noncanonical Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), vol. 1, p. 376).

[90] Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.3.6 (Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, The Early Church Fathers (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 62).

[91] Tertullian, *Praesc. haer.* 15.

[92] Athanasius, *Ep. episc.* 8.1 (Kinzig, §153).

[93] Curiously, this phrase (in the singular) comes from a heteroousian, Philostorgius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.7 (Kinzig, §80). *Acta* IV.81 of the Council of Constantinople II likewise cited the 'criminal creed'

Nicaea, the one by those 'who sided with Arius' was 'torn to pieces by all and was declared to be spurious and false'.[94] The creed presented by Eusebius of Caesarea allegedly had the same fate.[95] Augustine later observed, 'No small number of heretics have attempted to insinuate their poisonous doctrines into those brief sentences which constitute the creed.'[96]

The point is that theologically alternative appeals to Scripture were not only a possibility, but an actuality. That is, a different set of fundamental Scripture verses, amounting to different theologies, could be put forward as the framework for a creed. Accordingly, a particular set of selected scriptural texts in a creed could turn out to be 'orthodox' or 'heterodox', pro-Nicene or anti-Nicene.[97]

Indeed, one could pick from Scripture different texts and create different lists of normative textual hierarchies.[98] A particularly clear example of this phenomenon is the creed of Serdica. It begins with an elimination of a suspect interpretation of the key text of the eastern subordinationists — John 14:28 ('Father is greater than the Son') — and adds immediately a refutation of a 'false' interpretation of its own key text:

> But this is their blasphemous and corrupt interpretation, they argue contentiously that he [i.e. Christ] said, 'I and my Father are one' (John 10:30)

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of Theodore of Mopsuestia. And the New Testament itself urged everyone to be cognisant of the fact that there were false prophets, teachers, and apostles (2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:1; 2 Cor 11:13).

94 Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.7.15 (Kinzig, §135a1).

95 Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.8.1 (Kinzig, §135a2).

96 Augustine, *F. et symb.* 1.1.

97 For example, and respectively, Hilary, *Lib. Const.* 11 (Kinzig, §151e2) and Eunomius, *Exp. fid.*

98 Several years ago, at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, there was a session about teaching introductory courses for master's students in theology. Among other rather bizarre things proposed, a professor of a prominent ivy-league school recommended the following task: every incoming student should compose their own creed, which can then be discussed and analysed. Well, does not the *Definitio fidei* of the Council of Chalcedon rule, 'Those who dare either to compose another creed or even to promulgate or teach or hand down another creed […] are to be anathematized' (Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, pp. 87–87*; cf. Canon 7 of the Council of Ephesus)? Hilary of Poitiers cautioned against people who 'suit the faith to themselves rather than receive it' (*Trin.* 8.1, *Saint Hilary of Poitiers: The Trinity*, trans. by Stephen McKenna, FC 25 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2002), p. 274).

> on account of [their] harmony and concord and not as the unity of their hypostasis, which is one between the Father and the Son.[99]

A *Libellus fidei* attributed to Ambrose, in turn, starts out with John 10:30 and later applies John 14:28 to the incarnation.[100] And indeed, it does make a huge difference whether one begins constructing one's trinitarian credal statement with John 10:30 or 14:28!

Furthermore, selecting and highlighting certain Scripture verses was inevitably and already a matter of interpretation, and naturally not all interpretations arrived at the same result. For example, Tertullian argued against his opponent, who substituted a preposition 'in a sense not found in the holy Scriptures'.[101] While the creed was recited in an early anonymous *Expositio symboli* 5, it raised the issue, 'This is what the divine Scriptures have: ought we, with reckless mind, overpass the limits of the Apostles?'[102]

In short, it no longer sufficed to line up certain verses of Scripture as the structure of a creed. It did not suffice, because what Scripture exactly said was not self-evident and equally clear to everyone. Yet, no matter what kind of theology the authors of creeds represented, everyone was convinced of the fact that their creeds confessed that which Scripture (and the apostles) taught.[103]

Consequently, some sort of hermeneutical/theological criterion was desperately needed for assessing the adequacy of operating with a selected combination of scriptural proof-texts as summaries of Christian faith. Something had to secure that a given creed as a summary of

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[99] Kinzig, §144a2. Evidently, this is how Marcellus understood John 10:30 (Toom, 'Marcellus of Ancyra, Priscillian of Avila', pp. 64–65 and pp. 70–71).

[100] Kinzig, §513.

[101] Tertullian, *Carn. Chr.* 20.1 (Kinzig, §111d3). It concerned the phrase that Christ was born '*through* a virgin' vis-à-vis Christ was born '*from* a virgin'.

[102] The expected answer was, 'God forbid! Of course not!' But what exactly were the limits (cf. Prov 22:28)?

[103] 'Heretics' likewise claimed to be scriptural: Origen, *Dial. Herac.* 1 (Kinzig, §120a); Arius, *Ep. Eus.* (Kinzig, §131c); Asterius, *Frag.* 9 (Kinzig, §137a); Apollinarius of Laodicea in Athanasius(?), *Ep. Jov.* 3 (Kinzig, §164b).

Scripture was indeed scriptural and 'orthodox'. And this brings up, among other things, the importance of an interpretative tradition.[104]

Irenaeus taught that Scripture had to be interpreted 'in company with those who are presbyters in the Church, among whom is the apostolic doctrine'.[105] After confessing the Creed of Nicaea, the bishops at the Council of Ephesus felt the need to add a patristic *florilegium* for its correct interpretation:

> Since some pretend to confess and accept it while at the same time distorting the force of its expressions to their own opinion and so evading the truth [...] it has proved necessary to add testimonies from the holy and orthodox fathers that can fill out the meaning they have given to the words.[106]

Vincent of Lérins patiently explained that Scripture could not be adequately understood apart from church tradition (after all, Scripture was the apostolic tradition written down!).

> The understanding of the Holy Scripture must conform to the single rule of catholic teaching — and this especially in regard to those questions upon which the foundations of all catholic dogma are laid.[107]

To cite a later example as well where the importance of the interpretative tradition is clearly acknowledged, Cassiodorus insisted that Scripture had to be studied with its 'orthodox' commentary tradition. It was of paramount importance that Christians read Scripture 'together with its commentators', precisely because it provided the trusted interpretative tradition.[108]

In fact, since the second century, there had been a debate about whose interpretative tradition was on the side of the apostles/Scripture.

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[104] It was not a sequential process — first the creeds and after that the interpretative tradition. Rather, it was a kind of synchronous hermeneutical circle where texts and interpretative tradition(s) interacted.

[105] Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.32.1.

[106] Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, pp. 64–65*.

[107] Vincent of Lérins, *Comm.* 29 (*Vincent of Lérins*, trans. by Rudolph E. Morris, FC 7 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1949), p. 324). I have changed the capitalisation of the word 'catholic'.

[108] Cassiodorus, *Inst.* 1.24.1 (*Cassiodorus: Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning; and, On the Soul*, trans. by James W. Halporn, Translated Texts for Historians 42 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), p. 156). Cf. John of Damascus, *Exp. fid.* 2 (Kinzig, §243b); the creed of the Council of Rimini (Kinzig, §564a).

As Canon One of Hippolytus announces, 'We have cut them [i.e. their opponents] off because they disagree with the Holy Scriptures, the word of God, and with us, the disciples of the Scriptures.'[109] Alternative interpretations were resolutely rejected as unscriptural and, thus, heretical. Condemnation 11 at the Council of Constantinople II (553 CE) anathematised the interpretations of Christian faith by Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius, Apollinarius, Nestorius, Eutyches, Origen 'and all those who have thought or now think in the same way as the aforesaid heretics'.[110]

Space does not allow an elaboration on yet another intriguing issue: 'Can the already existing, purportedly inspired, and thus sacrosanct ancient creeds be updated?' The best known examples are the Apostles' Creed (R, or the early forms of the Apostles' Creed → T (*textus receptus*))[111] and the Nicene Creed (Nicaea → Constantinople, and the eventual addition of *filioque*).[112] Even though some creeds included an explicit warning against 'adding' anything to or 'removing' anything from them (cf. Deut 4:2; Rev 22:18–19),[113] the fact of the matter was that not only new words and phrases, but entire sections were added to or omitted from the ancient creeds.[114] Here two contradictory yet serious concerns tended to clash: 1) the need to exclude new heretical ideas/interpretations with a more precise and elaborate wording of a

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[109] Canons of Hippolytus (Kinzig, §138).

[110] Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, pp. 199–199*.

[111] In one of the earliest attestations of the Apostles' Creed, in Rufinus's *Expositio symboli*, the Roman creed is compared to a slightly different creed of Aquileia. Westra's monograph *The Apostles' Creed* is a meticulous assessment of the many regional variants of the Apostles' Creed (especially, pp. 99–276, Appendix II pp. 539–62).

[112] At the Council of Constantinople, bishops admitted that they confessed the creed 'in broader terms' (*Ep. Const.* in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, pp. 29–29*). Nevertheless, the original Creed of Nicaea continued to be used for quite some time after its updated version gained prominence.

[113] Anonymous (Ambrose?), *Exp. symb.* 7 (Kinzig, §15a2); Council of Ephesus (Kinzig, §205); a statement of faith at the Council of Rimini (Kinzig, §564a).

[114] The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381 CE) has soteriological and pneumatological sections which are missing in the Creed of Nicaea (325 CE), and it has omitted the phrases, such as 'from the *ousia* of the Father', 'God from God', 'all things in heaven and earth', as well as the anathemas.

creed, and 2) the need to preserve the 'original'[115] form of the creed for the sake of the *koinonia* with previous Christian generations (*communio sanctorum*).[116] The first justified the desire to 'update' the creeds and the second cautioned against ever changing anything in the ancient creeds.

Conclusion

In time, some western Christians no longer took the creed as such to be what the early Christians had taken it to be. They started highlighting the well-known problematic aspects of the traditional creeds:

- that creeds and confessions of faith were increasingly distinguished from the canonical Scripture;
- that there were just too many creeds, or too many versions of creeds, even if the 'heretical' ones were excluded;
- that the creeds did not always prove to be what they claimed to be;[117]
- that at times the creeds were imposed by emperors;[118]

[115] Quotation marks are used here because there was never a single *Urtext* for creeds. We either do not have it at all, or in the case of conciliar creeds, several parallel versions were prepared by different notaries.

[116] The same reason is behind the proposals by Steven R. Harmon, 'Baptist Confessions and the Patristic Tradition', *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 29, no. 4 (Winter, 2002), 349–358.

[117] It concerns the designations 'Apostles' Creed' and 'Athanasian Creed' (see Vinzent, *Der Ursprung des Apostolikums*, pp. 17–18, 80). De Lubac cites Harduinus, *Conc. coll.* 9:842–3, where the Greeks resisted the imposed union with the western church (Council of Florence, 1438), 'We neither profess nor even know this Apostles' Creed; if it had existed, the Book of Acts would have mentioned it' (*The Christian Faith*, p. 47). One can realise here that what Augustine had preached to catechumens, who received the (Apostles') creed (*traditio symboli*), had somehow become hazy, 'The things you are going to receive […] are not new things which you haven't heard before. I mean, you are quite used to hearing them in the holy scriptures and in sermons in church.' (*s.* 214.1, *Sermons*, WSA III/6 (1993), p. 150)

[118] For the messy story of the post-Nicene period, see Carlos R. Galvão-Sobrinho, *Doctrine and Power: Theological Controversy and Christian Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 125–51, and for the equally messy story of the Creed of Nicaea (325 CE) gaining its normativity, Smith, *The Idea of Nicaea*, pp. 13–26. Matthew Tindal, an eminent English deist, observed, '[It is] plain from the history that the ambitious, domineering part of the clergy, the imposers of creeds, canons, and constitutions, have proved to be the common plagues of mankind' (cited after Pelikan, *Credo*, p. 499).

- that creeds were regarded as prescriptive and religiously normative;[119]
- that creeds were associated with the church which was believed to have 'fallen';[120]
- that although occasionally updated, the official and fixed character of creeds seemed too restrictive of the free operations of the Spirit;[121]
- that creed did not include much about soteriology and said basically nothing about Jesus's ethical teachings;[122]
- that the ancient creeds also did not include the clauses on various favourite doctrinal issues which preoccupied a given movement;[123]

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119 At the first ecumenical council, 'the bishops were, for the first time, required to *subscribe* by their own hand to a *fixed formula*, setting out the orthodox faith and cursing those holding deviant opinions' (emphases original) (Wolfram Kinzig, 'What's in a Creed? A New Perspective on Old Texts', *Studia Patristica* 125 (2021), 75–96). Curiously, contemporary Christians who are vehemently against accepting the authority of any creed next to that of Scripture, do not mind pledging allegiance to their own statements of faith. Southern Baptist Convention seminaries require 'affirming and signing' their statements of faith, and the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) Board of Ministerial Standing requires that everyone 'must subscribe without mental reservation to the Statement of Faith of the EFCA and agree to reaffirm that conviction every five years', point IV.2 of 'Credentialing: Ministerial License(s), *EFCA* <https://go.efca.org/sites/default/files/resources/docs/2016/10/efca_vocational_ministry_license_packet.pdf> [accessed 1 April 2021].

120 The proposed timeframe when this allegedly happened varied, but many who operated with such a notion believed it had happened in the fourth century — right at the time of the emergence of the declaratory and conciliar creeds.

121 Soul liberty, rejection of ecclesiastical/priestly mediation, and 'becoming like little children' (Matt 18:3) seemed not to fit well with the standardised Apostles' Creed (T (*textus receptus*)) and with the philosophically more sophisticated wording of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. And the very end of the Athanasian Creed ('Everyone must believe it, firmly and steadfastly; otherwise he cannot be saved') seemed just unacceptable.

122 In connection with creeds, the above-used designation 'summary of Christian faith' has to be taken with a grain of salt. The reason is that creeds say very little about soteriology and ecclesiology, as well as about Christian conduct (Kinzig, 'What's in a Creed?). And after all, which articles of faith should make up the summary of Christian faith?

123 One need only compare the clauses of the post-Reformation statements of faith with those of the ancient creeds and the difference becomes crystal clear. One of the best-known Baptist confessions, the Second London Confession of Particular Baptists (1689), has thirty-two clauses over-against the traditional twelve clauses of the Apostles' Creed. See <https://www.1689.com/confession.html> [accessed 1 April 2021]. One of the primary

- and that individual 'soul competency' somehow mattered more than the established consensuses and ecclesial authority.

All these reasons, as well as several others, contributed to the fact that eventually not only ancient creeds, but creeds/confessions as such, became suspect at least in some churches. Due to the contrary understanding of Scripture and tradition, significantly longer denominational confessions,[124] as well as new and relatively 'baggage-free' confessional/covenantal statements among the followers of the 'cut-flower faith', seemed theologically safer options than trusting the ancient summaries of Scripture, which of course were never intended to compete with Scripture, but which nevertheless came to be perceived as something distinct from and even contrary to Scripture. Yet the Apostles' Creed and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed should be perceived as they were meant to be perceived — *verbum breviatum* [*Dei*] — and be confessed in worship services together with the wider Christian community.[125]

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reasons for the composition of denominational creeds/confessions was that the ancient creeds did not 'speak directly to numbers of theological issues arising in the reformatory times' (William L. Lumpkin, 'The Nature and Authority of Baptist Confessions of Faith', *Review and Expositor*, 76, no. 1 (1979), 17–28 (p. 17)). On p. 24, Lumpkin lists ecclesiology, the ordinances of the Lord, preaching/missions, and freedom of conscience.

124 Putman, 'Baptists, *Sola Scriptura*, and the Place of the Christian Tradition', pp. 28–33, 44–51.

125 Curtis Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), pp. 99–105; Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought 27 (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006), pp. 8–10, 34–36, 163–165; Steven R. Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future: Story, Tradition, and the Recovery of Community* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), pp. 180–181. In their 'Proposal' (No 7), even (some?) Southern Baptists announce, 'We encourage the ongoing affirmation, confession, and catechetical use of the three ecumenical creeds […] We believe these confessional documents express […] the deposit of faith taught in Holy Scripture and received by the church throughout space and time' (although the adjective 'ecumenical' should not be used in connection with the Apostles' Creed and the Athanasian Creed). (Emerson et al., *Baptists and the Christian Tradition*, p. 354)

Changing Spiritual Identity: St Andrew's Street Baptist Church, Cambridge, from the 1730s to the 1920s

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Abstract:
The story of St Andrew's Street Baptist Church, Cambridge, from the 1730s to the 1920s illuminates the place of those in the 'Dissenting' tradition in the context of a university setting in which for much of that time they were outsiders. The spiritual identity of this strategic church did not remain fixed over time, although there was clear continuity. This study focuses on the influence of those who were pastors of the church over the course of two centuries. It is not that the pastors shaped everything that characterised the church's life. However, those examined in this article each brought a distinctive emphasis, often addressed to the context of the period in which they served. The main emphases considered are freedom, spiritual improvement, a commitment to spreading the gospel, Christian work issuing from God's blessing, and witness to a growing university population. Although elements of all of these aspects were present throughout the period, I argue here that the church's spiritual identity underwent significant change.

Keywords:
Baptist; Cambridge; university; spiritual identity

Introduction

The story of St Andrew's Street Baptist Church, Cambridge, from the 1730s to the 1920s illuminates the place of those in the 'Dissenting' — later usually termed 'Nonconformist' and still later 'Free Church' — tradition in the context of a university setting in which for much of that time they were outsiders. The spiritual identity of this strategic church did not remain fixed over time, although there was clear continuity. This study focuses on the influence of those who were pastors of the church over the course of two centuries. It is not that the pastors shaped everything that characterised the church's life. However, those

examined here each brought a distinctive emphasis, often addressed to the context of the period in which they served. The main emphases considered in the course of this article are freedom, spiritual improvement, evangelism, work issuing from God's blessing, and witness to a growing university population. Although elements of all of these aspects were present throughout the period, I argue that the church's spiritual identity underwent significant change.

'A Free People': 1730s–1780s

Baptists in England in the seventeenth century were part of a wider movement of dissent from the Church of England.[1] In Cambridge, as elsewhere, this led to new congregations starting. In 1689, the Toleration Acts gave an increased measure of freedom in worship to those outside the Church of England, although civic restrictions continued. It was in the late 1720s that the Baptist fellowship in Cambridge which became St Andrew's Street Baptist Church was formed. These Dissenters met in a refitted stable and granary, known as the Stone Yard, in St Andrew's parish. Their pastor for the first decade was Andrew Harper. Little is known about him. A notable successor of Harper as minister of the congregation, Robert Robinson (1735–1790), described him as 'a real Christian, a Protestant dissenter on principle, a Baptist indeed, neither ashamed to practise immersion himself, nor afraid to tolerate his brethren that differed'. He was loved by the church. The first record of members shows a small group of twenty-one (thirteen men and eight women). Gradual growth took place under Harper's ministry, which ended when he died in 1741.[2]

From 1745 to 1758 the Stone Yard pastor was a Scot, George Simpson, who had a Master of Arts degree from Aberdeen University, indicating an unusual level of scholarship for Baptists of that time. He had wide experience, having had three previous pastorates. In theology

[1] For background see Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters, Vol. 1: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

[2] Robert Robinson, in *Church Book: St Andrew's Street Baptist Church, Cambridge, 1720-1832* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1991), p. 15; G. F. Nuttall, 'The First Seventy Years', in *St Andrew's Street Baptist Church*, ed. by K. A. C. Parsons (Cambridge: St Andrew's Street Baptist Church), pp. 1–18 (p. 3).

he was high Calvinist.[3] Although while he was pastor some members were called into Baptist ministry, the Stone Yard church as a whole did not flourish. Membership declined. Robinson, as successor to Simpson, was uncompromising in his judgement: Simpson was 'a rigid Baptist, of a violent temper, a Lord in his church'. According to Robinson, the happy congregation to which Simpson was called became 'soured and disunited', and 'dispirited with their prospect'. For a few months, all services ceased.[4] Simpson moved to Norwich, and through contacts in Norwich and in the Cambridge area, principally the influential Anne Dutton, who 'knew everyone worth knowing in the Evangelical Revival',[5] the Stone Yard congregation received the message that the twenty-three-year-old Robinson 'might perhaps be persuaded to undertake the pastorate'.[6]

Robinson's first occupations had been as an apprentice to a hairdresser and then to a butcher in London. He experienced evangelical conversion through the preaching of a leader in the Evangelical Revival, George Whitefield. When Robinson heard Whitefield, he initially pitied 'the poor deluded Methodists' — his own inclination was to rationalism — but he came away 'envying their happiness'. His conversion followed three years later.[7] He moved to East Anglia, where he took up farm work, became a popular young preacher with the Methodists, and kept in touch with Whitefield. In 1759, however, he was baptised by immersion and soon some Baptists who knew him were struck by his unusual ability.[8] He preached for two years at the Stone Yard and received many requests from members to be their pastor, but was hesitant because of his lack of experience and training: he was self-taught. In 1761, he accepted a call and wrote later of how the members 'tenderly loved him'. He and his wife Ellen found 'fathers, brothers,

[3] For high Calvinism, see Peter J. Morden, 'Continuity and Change: Particular Baptists in the "Long Eighteenth Century" (1689-1815)', in *Challenge and Change: English Baptist Life in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Stephen Copson and Peter J. Morden (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2017), pp. 1–28 (pp. 8–12).
[4] Robinson, in *Church Book*, p. 18.
[5] Nuttall, 'The First Seventy Years', p. 4.
[6] Graham W. Hughes, *With Freedom Fired* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1955), p. 16.
[7] Luke Tyerman, *The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield*, 2 vols, 2nd edn (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890), 2, 408.
[8] Nuttall, 'The First Seventy Years', p. 5; Hughes, *With Freedom Fired*, p. 16.

sisters'. His description of his role was that he was 'the free minister of a free people' (in part a reference to the Church of England's 'conformity'), who were in 'covenant' to 'walk in faithfulness, forbearance, and tenderness to each other'.[9]

The Stone Yard members numbered thirty-four in 1761. Not much could be given to Robinson as financial support, yet he and Ellen welcomed needy people into their home.[10] Membership gradually grew, largely through conversions. By 1774 it was 120.[11] This is no guide to the dramatic growth in the numbers attending. With financial help from some wealthy supporters, a chapel was built seating six hundred. It was filled and over-filled on Sundays. The new building attracted people who would not have come to the previous meeting-place, which was damp, cold, and in a deteriorating state.[12] Members of any church were welcome to the Lord's Supper, which was celebrated monthly. In line with his advocacy of 'toleration', Robinson insisted on 'open' or 'free' rather than 'closed' communion.[13] In some instances, those baptised as infants but not as believers became church members. More might have sought membership, but the giving of testimony and the answering of questions about their spiritual experience was probably frightening for some.[14] Among those attending by the 1770s were students of Cambridge University. Dissenters were barred from graduating from the University, and most students would have known only Church of England worship. Some were attentive. Others interrupted the services, until in 1773 Robinson preached and published a satirical sermon about them and improvement ensued.[15]

The congregation was known to cater for a wide variety of needs. Many of the poor who attended were helped financially. Deacons were elected, with part of their duties being practical care, and Robinson

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[9] Robinson, in *Church Book*, pp. 20–21, 25–26.
[10] George Dyer, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Robert Robinson* (London: G. and J. Robinson, 1796), pp. 136–38.
[11] Robinson, in *Church Book*, p. 51.
[12] Len Addicott, 'Introduction', *Church Book*, pp. i–xl (p. xiii).
[13] See Robert Robinson, *The General Doctrine of Toleration Applied to the Particular Case of Free Communion* (Cambridge: W. Cowper, 1781).
[14] Nuttall, 'The First Seventy Years', pp. 8–9.
[15] Hughes, *With Freedom Fired*, pp. 20–22. The sermon as published was *A Lecture on a Becoming Behaviour in Religious Assemblies* (1776).

took a personal interest in those struggling. Lists of church members showed their occupation, with the largest group being labourers. Some others were skilled workers, such as carpenters, shoemakers, and glovers. Farmers were well represented and Robinson himself took up farming to support his large family. Among the occupations of women in the church were nurses, seamstresses, and grocers.[16] One member, Mary Morris, was described by Robinson as 'the servant of the church', perhaps a role similar to later deaconesses. Robinson set up Methodist style 'classes', including for children. Recognising the variety in his congregation, Robinson shaped the main services for those who formed the bulk of the worshippers, while on Sunday evenings he gave lectures that employed, as he described it, 'another language', appealing to 'town and gown'. Those drawn in over time included lawyers, school teachers, business people, and a University Professor of Music, John Randall.[17]

As a preacher, Robinson's style was 'more conversational than oratorical, reasoning from the scriptures, teaching, pleasing, persuading, delighting'.[18] He was also an advocate of lively hymn-singing in worship, and composed several hymns. He drew from John Randall's expertise.[19] As well as preaching in Cambridge, Robinson engaged in wider ministry around Cambridgeshire villages, which meant he was in touch with thousands of people. He would preach in a village at 5.00 a.m., before work began, or at 6.30 p.m., when work and meals had finished. One of his published books contained sixteen 'discourses' that were 'addressed to Christian assemblies in villages near Cambridge'.[20] At busy times, such as harvest, he did not arrange meetings. His love for those in rural areas was such that he became known as the 'bishop of barns and fields'.[21]

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[16] For an analysis, see Faith Bowers and Brian Bowers, 'After the Benediction: Eighteenth-century Baptist Laity', in *Challenge and Change*, ed. by Copson and Morden, pp. 233–258 (pp.236–37).

[17] L. G. Champion, 'Robert Robinson: A Pastor in Cambridge', *Baptist Quarterly*, 31, no. 5 (January 1986), 241–46.

[18] Addicott, 'Introduction', p. xii.

[19] The best known was 'Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing'. See Benjamin Flower, ed., *Robinson's Miscellaneous Works*, 4 vols (Harlow: B. Flower, 1807), 4, 346.

[20] Robert Robinson, *Sixteen Discourses on Several Texts of Scripture: Addressed to Christian Assemblies in Villages near Cambridge* (London: Charles Dilly, 1786). For further background, see Raymond Brown, 'Church Planting in the Evangelical Revival: A Cambridgeshire Baptist Perspective', *Baptist Quarterly*, 47, no. 3 (2016), 95–109.

[21] E. Paxton Hood, *The Vocation of the Preacher* (London: Hodder, 1886), p. 498.

When baptisms took place in the villages, they were usually in a river. By the 1780s, Robinson was known further afield and was being asked by Baptists and other Dissenters to preach and write. He was a voracious reader, and through university friends he was able to borrow books for research. In an erudite history he wrote of the Baptist movement, amounting to 650 pages, he saw the Anabaptists as part of the story.[22]

While Robinson's priority was the health of Dissenting communities in and around Cambridge, he was also concerned about national affairs. Several speeches and writings — in favour of the American Revolution and political reform in Britain, and against slavery, which he called 'a dishonour to humanity'[23] — were addressed to Parliament. Other Baptist ministers were active campaigners, but Robinson was one of the most outspoken. A petition appeared in *The Cambridge Chronicle* in 1775 opposing the warlike measures of the British government, with Robinson and Joseph Saunders, the Congregational minister in Cambridge, prominent among signatories. In the early 1780s, Robinson and some members of his congregation called for 'correction of all abuses in the expenditure of public money'.[24] In 1783, Robinson formed the Cambridge Constitutional Society, which met in the Black Bull tavern. Ebenezer Hollick and William Nash, a trustee and deacon at St Andrew's Street respectively, were central figures in what was a forum for revolutionary ideas. Robinson wrote that he preached 'civil and religious liberty' there, and following that, 'when tea comes, theology'.[25] It was alleged by some that his theology moved towards Unitarianism near the end of his life, but this has been refuted.[26] In 1789, writing about spiritual and civic freedom, he saw the 'merit' of congregations of 'us poor anabaptists' as being 'a love of liberty'.[27] In

[22] Robert Robinson, *The History of Baptism* (London: Couchman and Fry, 1790). See Hughes, *With Freedom Fired*, pp. 64–68.
[23] See for example, George Dyer, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Robert Robinson* (London: G. and J. Robinson, 1796), p. 196.
[24] James E. Bradley, 'Baptists and National Politics in Late Eighteenth-century England', in *Challenge and Change*, ed. by Copson and Morden, pp. 150–51, 158–59. See Robert Robinson, *A Political Catechism*, 2nd edn (London: W. and J. F. Lepard, 1784).
[25] *The Cambridge Chronicle*, 16 January 1790; Hughes, *With Freedom Fired*, pp. 48–49.
[26] Addicott in his 'Introduction', pp. xvii–xviii, shows the fallacies on which that view was based.
[27] Benjamin Flower, *Posthumous Works of Robert Robinson* (Harlow: B. Flower, 1812), pp. 304–10.

this period, Robinson's calls for religious and political freedom shaped St Andrew's Street's spiritual identity.

'Spiritual Improvement': 1790s–early 1800s

Robinson died in June 1790, following a nervous breakdown which seems to have been precipitated by the death of his seventeen-year-old daughter Julia.[28] The St Andrew's Street members mourned their 'brilliant' minister. They also began looking for a successor. Soon they were in touch with Robert Hall (1764–1831), who had trained at Bristol Baptist Academy. After studying for a Master of Arts in Aberdeen, he returned to the Academy as classical tutor. He had a reputation for incisive preaching and was 'exceptionally well read in both classical and modern thought'.[29] Hall came to preach at St Andrew's Street as a result of an invitation in September 1790 and found a congregation that was large, but that had declined somewhat. The church in Cambridge which was now attracting many students was Holy Trinity Church, where Charles Simeon was established as a major evangelical influence, not only in Cambridge but far beyond.[30] Hall was invited to St Andrew's Street for six months. At that stage he was given an insight into the church's identity: a letter to him on 16 October spoke of the church having 'no doctrinal covenant or any other bond of union than Christian love and virtue'. They had been 'well instructed by their late excellent pastor in freedom of enquiry'.[31]

The next step was that Hall was called as pastor in June 1791. He accepted a month later. He was being invited to what was now a significant church, as someone with 'intellectual stature and preaching ability' considered unrivalled in Baptist life in England.[32] In his

[28] George Cubitt, 'Reminiscences', *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 5 (1849), 598–99.
[29] B. R. White, 'Robert Hall and his Successors', in *St Andrew's Street Baptist Church*, ed. by Parsons, pp. 19–39 (p. 19); J. H. Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1994), p. 161.
[30] Charles Simeon once asked advice from Robinson about evening lectures. The only advice from Robinson was to join the Dissenters (Hugh Evan Hopkins, *Charles Simeon of Cambridge* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977), p. 192).
[31] William Hollick (on behalf of the church members) to Robert Hall, 16 October 1790, *Church Book*, pp. 75–76.
[32] Addicott, 'Introduction', p. xix.

acceptance letter, read to the congregation, Hall hoped that with God's help his 'endeavours for your [the church's] spiritual improvement may be successful'. He asked for their prayers, as he felt his own 'inability'.[33] Whereas Robinson had found his way into Baptist life, Hall was the son of a much-loved Baptist minister who wrote a book that influenced William Carey and helped to bring to birth the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS).[34] Some in St Andrew's Street apparently saw their new pastor, 'a man of splendid talents', as '*almost* as liberal and unshackled' in theology as they wished.[35] Hall had certainly proved at Broadmead Baptist Church, Bristol, and at the Academy that he could communicate widely, including to students: he showed 'a masterly grasp of ideas, intellectual depth and superb use of language'.[36]

At St Andrew's Street, Hall was determined to keep intellectual aspects of his interests secondary to his major aim of 'spiritual improvement'. His first sermon was on the atonement and its practical application to life. Immediately after the sermon, someone in the congregation confronted him. This was probably William Frend, a fellow of Jesus College and a tutor in the University who later embraced Unitarian views. A debate ensued in which Hall defended his evangelical doctrine. When told that his theology would suit only 'old women' seeking comfort as they thought of death, Hall replied that if a doctrine was true then it was for old women and everyone.[37] Although a few left the church in protest, numbers overall grew. Hall did not shy away from controversy, and like Robinson, he became very widely known through his political writings. In 1793, for example, he wrote advocating the freedom of the press and 'general liberty'.[38] His writing on political topics was stimulated by a study group in Cambridge which included some Anglicans as well as Dissenters. He later considered that it was a

[33] Robert Hall to St Andrew's Street Baptist Church, 24 July 1791, *Church Book*, p. 77.
[34] William Carey said regarding Robert Hall Snr's book, *Helps to Zion's Travellers*, that he had 'never read a book with such rapture' (Samuel Pearce Carey, *William Carey* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1923), pp. 33–34).
[35] Olinthus Gregory, *A Memoir of Robert Hall* (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1833), pp. 49–50.
[36] Addicott, 'Introduction', p. xix.
[37] Gregory, *A Memoir*, pp. 51–52. For Frend, see Frida Knight, *University Rebel: The Life of William Frend* (London: Gollancz, 1971).
[38] Robert Hall, *An Apology for the Freedom of the Press, and for General Liberty* (Cambridge: W. H. Lunn, 1893).

mistake for a minister to be so politically outspoken, although his reforming views remained unchanged.[39]

As a pastor, Hall was fully involved with his congregation. He looked out for those who were new to the services, and had a scheme by which he visited all the church members and as many as possible of the congregation once every three months. Hall enjoyed being with others and as a bachelor he was happy to be out in the evenings, spending time with families and often arriving early to meet the children. The congregation varied greatly, and with some he engaged in philosophical and theological conversation. When with those whom he knew could afford to provide evening meals, he accepted offers with relish. But when he visited poor members, he tended to eat very little so as not to involve them in undue expense.[40] As B. R. White noted, Hall encouraged small groups for study, spiritual discussion, and prayer. Most of these met weekly in the winter and fortnightly in the summer. For Hall, his involvement with these gatherings, either as visitor or host, enabled him to assess — as if using a 'thermometer' — the spiritual state of the church.[41]

In 1795, against the background of some university students moving from Holy Trinity Church to St Andrew's Street, Charles Simeon preached against the Baptists: as recorded by Hall in a long open letter, Simeon had warned in a sermon 'of the artful methods they [Dissenters] took to draw men off from the Church [of England]; and that the BAPTISTS in particular would never be satisfied till they got your people under the water'. In his letter, Hall suggested that Simeon's ignorance of the controversy between the Established Church and Dissenters must be 'extreme' if Simeon thought that 'general invectives' would resolve the issues.[42] Hall was encouraged that the numbers in Cambridge University questioning a state Church were increasing. In 1798, William Mansel was appointed master of Trinity College and when there was discussion in the University of the fact that up to sixty

[39] White, 'Robert Hall and his Successors', p. 20.
[40] Gregory, *A Memoir*, pp. 64, 67.
[41] White, 'Robert Hall and his Successors', p. 20.
[42] Robert Hall, 'Letter to the Rev. Charles Simeon, A.M.', 7 August 1795, in *The Works of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M.* (New York: Carvill, 1830), vol. 2, pp. 349–55 (capitals in original). This was an early edition of Hall's *Works*.

students and tutors regularly attended the Baptist congregation, Mansel defended Hall. Some wanted to forbid anyone in the University from attending Dissenting worship, but Mansel stated that he had great admiration for Hall, and added that he might have been in Hall's congregation but for his position in the University.[43]

In 1804, Hall, who had suffered from physical pain throughout his life, found himself in a state of depression. The church gave him financial support to take time away from Cambridge, but although he experienced some recovery, he had to resign from the pastorate in 1806. In his resignation letter, he spoke of the 'uninterrupted harmony' which had marked his years as pastor. He thanked the members for their 'candour, kindness and generosity', and prayed that 'the truths it has been my humble endeavour to inculcate among you may take deeper and deeper root in your hearts and lives'. Replying to Hall, their 'Dear Brother', the deacons, on behalf of the church, affirmed that 'the prevailing desire of your heart, and the constant object of your labours was, to disseminate among us the knowledge of the true God and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent'. They prayed that 'the important truths which you have so repeatedly and energetically inculcated may be constantly adhered to by us'.[44] After recovering from his illness, Hall became the minister of the church at Harvey Lane, Leicester, where William Carey had been pastor, and he remained there for twenty years, preaching to capacity congregations.[45] His vision was for spiritual renewal, and this re-shaped the identity of St Andrew's Street.

'Spreading the Knowledge of the Gospel': 1830s–1870s

Over the next thirty years there were successively four pastors of St Andrew's Street. Three of the pastorates were of relatively short duration,[46] but Thomas Edmonds (1784–1869), who came in 1812,

[43] Graham W. Hughes, *Robert Hall* (London: The Carey Press, 1943), pp. 49–50.
[44] Robert Hall to the Church, 4 March 1806; William Hollick, on behalf of the Church, to Robert Hall, 9 March 1806, *Church Book*, pp. 78–80.
[45] For Hall's life as a whole, see as above: Hughes, *Robert Hall* (1943).
[46] These were F. A. Cox (1806–1808), whose subsequent career in London was one of great influence, but who had ill health in Cambridge; Samuel Chase (1809–1810), who also had poor health; and Joshua Gray (1832–1836), who had doubts about his call to ministry. For Cox, see

stayed almost twenty years. He had studied at Bristol Baptist College and had a Master of Arts from Aberdeen. Edmonds was well respected in the Cambridge area and beyond. In 1819, he preached in London for the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), published under the title 'Christian Missions Vindicated and Encouraged'.[47] He wrote a circular letter in 1834 on 'Christian Union', addressing the increasing number of Baptist churches and ministers in Cambridgeshire, encouraging an Association, and advocating 'cordial affection of Christians towards each other' and 'generous co-operation on Christian principles'. He noted that particularly for Baptists, union was of 'real disciples of Christ, manifestly declared to be such by their public profession of his name, by their cordial attachment to his truth and cause, and by their participation of his spirit'.[48] By this time, there was greater freedom for Nonconformists (as they were increasingly called) in public life. A new Chapel was erected for the St Andrew's Street congregation, and while without a building the congregation joined the Congregationalists, with whom relationships were close.[49]

In November 1837, Robert Roff (1800–1850) began as the St Andrew's Street pastor. Edmonds, who had almost lost his sight, remained in the church and gave help in ministry. Roff had trained at the Bristol College and had been a pastor in Swansea, Wales. He came to Cambridge at a time when St Andrew's Street was playing a central role in a network of Baptist churches in the area.[50] In the same year as Roff began his ministry, Henry Battiscombe, a fellow of King's College, gave up Anglican ministry, was baptised, and joined St Andrew's Street. The church meeting minutes noted that he was 'making great pecuniary sacrifices'. Supported by St Andrew's Street, Battiscombe pioneered a new Baptist cause in Cambridge, which became Zion Baptist Church.[51] Roff's early years saw steady growth, with membership at 240 in 1846,

J. H. Y. Briggs, 'F.A. Cox of Hackney: Nineteenth-Century Baptist Theologian, Historian, Controversialist, and Apologist', *Baptist Quarterly*, 38, no. 8 (October 2000), 392–411.

47 T. C. Edmonds, *Christian Missions Vindicated and Encouraged* (London: Button & Son, 1819).

48 T. C. Edmonds, *Christian Union* (Cambridge: W. Metcalfe, 1834), p. 4.

49 White, 'Robert Hall and his Successors', p. 25.

50 For the emergence of an Association, see Raymond Brown, *Cambridgeshire Baptist Association: Centenary, 1878-1978* (Cambridge: CBA, 1978).

51 Minutes of Church Meeting, 1 May 1937. A2/1; W. V. Pitts, *Zion: One Hundred Years of Baptist Witness, 1837-1937* (Cambridge: Zion Baptist Church, 1937), pp. 5–10.

but also set-backs, the most notable being a valued deacon, James Nutter, resigning from the diaconate and membership for a time because of 'failure and bankruptcy'.[52]

Roff produced a church *Manual* in 1846 and this was distributed at a special meeting and social tea in the Chapel. It contained a sketch of the church's history and set out a 'Constitution and Order of the Church'. The church 'should consist of real Christians', with its life based on 'agreement to the essential doctrines of the gospel' and 'evidence of personal piety and holiness'. St Andrew's Street held to 'the right of private judgement', to 'liberty of conscience', and to Christ alone as 'the head of the church'. Coming after these statements, there was an affirmation of 'the Holy Scriptures as a rule of faith and practice'. Seven objections to the Church of England were made: to the supremacy of the king or queen over the Established Church; to the support of religion being enforced by the civil power; to the orders of bishops, priests, and deacons, since the New Testament had only pastors and deacons; to Anglican ceremonies; to absolution offered in visiting the sick; to patrons who chose ministers, since they should be chosen by the people; and to the lack of Scriptural discipline. After this damning list, the *Manual* moderated it by saying of many ministers and members in the Church of England that we 'embrace them in true Christian love'.[53]

The picture conveyed in the *Manual* is of Roff as a very active minister with a focus on evangelism. Work being done among young people included Sunday Schools in different locations, with up to thirty members as teachers, and Bible Classes, some of which were led by Roff. There was an emphasis on service for the needy, which was not seen as separate from evangelism. Through a 'Dorcas Society', women in the church organised distribution of clothing to the poor. Opportunities for prayer included Sunday prayer meetings at 7.00 a.m. and 8.00 p.m. and also one on a Monday evening. Sunday School teachers had their own prayer meetings.[54] Roff looked for ways to help young people to develop spiritually and he set up a library of 'valuable

[52] Minutes of Church Meeting, 28 April 1842. A2/1.
[53] *A Manual for the Members of the Church in St Andrew's Street Chapel, Cambridge* (Cambridge: St Andrew's Street Chapel, 1946), pp. 6–9. L1/1.
[54] *Manual*, pp. 16–20. L1/1.

books' for young people and others. It is likely that he inspired a report which stated that 'the great Head of the Church has vouchsafed his abundant blessing' on the church's Sunday Schools. They had been used in 'spreading the knowledge of the Gospel', and 'large numbers have thereby been savingly converted to God', with many 'eminently useful both at home and abroad'.[55]

The church suffered a shock in 1850, when Roff died after being ill for only three days. He was much missed. The concern he had shown for developing the next generation was highlighted a year after his death, when one of the young St Andrew's Street Sunday School teachers, C. H. Spurgeon, became pastor of the Baptist Chapel in the nearby village of Waterbeach. As B. R. White notes, the prayer by St Andrew's Street that God would abundantly bless Spurgeon's ministry was 'certainly answered'.[56] At about the time Spurgeon went to Waterbeach, William Robinson (1804–1874) came to St Andrew's Street. He had been a pastor for twenty-two years at Fuller Chapel, Kettering, and stood in the tradition of evangelical Calvinism.[57] He was a supporter of world mission, particularly through the BMS, an advocate of Congregational church government, and a participant in debates about the Bible and science. His writings covered all these subjects.[58] In his expository preaching his 'whole being was aflame with the realised presence of the ever-living Christ'.[59]

Although William Robinson was a reasoned defender of Baptist ecclesiology, he argued in his book *Biblical Studies* (1866) that divisions in Protestantism were 'a disgrace', and he looked forward to the end of 'denominationalism' and to a fuller Christian union.[60] His Baptist standing led to his being elected to the presidency of the Baptist Union in 1870, and during his presidential year he gave an address at Baptist Union meetings in Cambridge on lessons from Baptist history. In his

[55] This report was reproduced in the Church Meeting minutes, 2 April 1846. A2/1.
[56] White, 'Robert Hall and his Successors', p. 29.
[57] See Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003).
[58] White, 'Robert Hall and his Successors', pp. 29–32.
[59] James A. Aldis, 'Reminiscences of the Abolition of Religious Tests in the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge', *Baptist Quarterly*, 4, no. 6 (April 1929), 249–258 (p.252). Aldis had attended St Andrew's Street as a student.
[60] William Robinson, *Biblical Studies* (London: Longmans, 1866), pp. 255, 260.

address he spoke about the new Baptist movement from Germany, which he estimated as seventy thousand strong across Europe and 'of which Mr Oncken is the leader'. He also offered a positive portrayal of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement.[61] This was at a time when English Baptists were giving little attention to the Anabaptists.[62] In 1872, Robinson urged St Andrew's Street to be true to the doctrine of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ.[63] Under Thomas Edmonds, Robert Roff, and William Robinson, the congregation of St Andrew's Street was inspired and guided by an evangelical vision for spreading the knowledge of the gospel.[64]

'Good and Blessed Work': 1880s–1900s

William Robinson resigned in 1873, and the church was without a minister for five years. Membership had reached 368 in 1870. Despite some falling off after that, during the years without a minister several plans were agreed: for welcoming visitors, for a new church hall, and for an extensive local evangelistic programme.[65] A meeting in 1878 in the home of James Nutter brought the Cambridgeshire Baptist Association into being.[66] A year later, Graham Tarn became the new St Andrew's Street minister. He had trained at the Pastors' College (later Spurgeon's College), London, the first pastor of St Andrew's Street to do so. His ministry before coming to Cambridge was in Peckham, South London. Although trained in a Calvinistic theological environment, Tarn came to St Andrew's Street knowing it had stated during the search for a new minister that its 'fellowship as a church' was based 'not on any exact

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[61] 'A few lines of Baptist history and their lessons', *The Baptist Handbook* (London: Baptist Union, 1870), pp. 17–18.

[62] Some work had been undertaken on the Anabaptists through the Hanserd Knollys Society in the 1840s. See E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1959), pp. 66–68. For later study, see J. H. Y Briggs, 'Richard Heath, 1831–1912', in *Freedom and the Powers*, ed. by A. R. Cross and J. H. Y. Briggs (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2014), pp. 67–82.

[63] William Robinson, *The Fatherhood of God* (Cambridge: St Andrew's Street, 1872).

[64] The evangelical distinctives portrayed by David Bebbington in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 2–17, were clear: conversionism, activism, biblicism, crucicentrism.

[65] 'St Andrew's Street Church Book', vol. 2, pp. 164–65, St Andrew's Street Archive.

[66] Brown, *Association*, p. 9.

conformity to any precise statement of belief but on agreement to the essential doctrines of the Gospel'. Tarn was certainly attracted by the church's following statement: 'We cheerfully admit the eminent piety of many of the Anglican clergy and members […] with whom we would readily join in religious exercises.'[67] The growth of pan-denominational evangelicalism was significant for him.

As pastor, Tarn wanted to lead by example in what the deacons were later to call 'good and blessed work'. He highlighted the prayer meetings on Sundays and changed the afternoon service on Sundays to one of Bible study and fellowship. The minutes of deacons' meetings in 1879–80 show Tarn discussing a range of topics: visiting the congregation; promoting prayer for world mission; supporting other Baptist churches; and taking account of temperance views by providing a separate cup at communion with unfermented wine for those — amounting to fifteen — who would not drink alcoholic wine.[68] The St Andrew's Street membership was growing rapidly. Congregational records show 353 members in 1881, 398 in 1882, and 427 in 1883. Among the new members were some attending Cambridge University, which now allowed Nonconformists to graduate.[69] A mission outreach was opened in Mill Road in Cambridge, with George Apthorpe from St Andrew's Street taking a lead.[70] For Tarn, the challenge as more people joined the church was to see spiritual commitment deepened. An example is Florence Doggett, who joined the church in 1882 at age fifteen, was a Sunday School teacher for four years, and went in 1889, at age twenty-two, as a missionary to China with the interdenominational China Inland Mission (CIM). She and her husband and three children were tragically murdered in 1900 in the Boxer Uprising.[71]

In January 1884, Tarn drew attention in a deacons' meeting to issues of worship. He spoke of 'the miserable singing in the sanctuary',

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[67] G. W. Byrt, 'The Last Hundred Years', in *St Andrew's Street Baptist Church*, ed. by Parsons, pp. 40–41.

[68] Minutes of Deacons' Meetings, 29 September 1879, 4 May 1880, 28 Sept 1880. B1/1.

[69] Statistics in File L1/4.

[70] Minutes of Deacons' Meetings, 2 May 1881. B1/1.

[71] 'Church Members who have Served on the Mission Field', in *St Andrew's Street Baptist Church*, ed. by Parsons, p. 58. Florence Doggett's husband was Charles I'Anson.

and it was agreed that someone competent in musical affairs be consulted about an organ.[72] The future Baptist historian W. T. Whitley was a student in the University in this period and became part of a group of singers leading from the front of the church, 'assisted by a harmonium'.[73] Discussions about an organ continued at deacons' meetings. It was decided to consult the organist at King's College Chapel, and one church member, Dr A. C. Ingle, suggested a weekly meeting of singers, which he volunteered to lead.[74] Raising funds for an organ took years: it was ultimately installed in 1892. In the meantime, renovation work was done on the Chapel premises and when a Baptist mission in the Chesterton area of Cambridge asked St Andrew's Street for expert help with building issues, it was agreed that a small group would guide the Chesterton Mill Road missions.[75] Tarn saw the deacons as well equipped to deal with practical matters, but in line with his priorities, he encouraged them to seek deeper fellowship through prayer. In 1886 they adopted a rhythm by which every three months they met for 'our own spiritual improvement', with each deacon sharing some thought for three minutes and prayer following each contribution.[76]

In the period from the mid-1880s to the mid-1890s there were typically over twenty new members welcomed at each church meeting, mostly through baptism rather than transfer from other churches. Membership grew to more than six hundred and attendance at church meetings reached about 250.[77] Each year Tarn suggested a church theme. In 1886 it was 'Abiding and Faithfulness'. The 1888 theme, 'No Condemnation in Christ Jesus', was taken up by the deacons and linked with a change regarding visitors at the Lord's Table. The previous invitation to 'members of all Christian churches' to come to the Table was seen as denominational and was replaced by an invitation to all 'who believe in and love our Lord Jesus Christ'.[78] Tarn arranged for preachers

[72] Minutes of Deacons' Meeting, 1 January 1884. B1/1.
[73] Seymour J. Price, 'Dr William Thomas Whitley', *Baptist Quarterly*, 12, nos. 10–11 (1948), 357–63.
[74] Minutes of Deacons' Meetings, 25 March 1884; 26 May 1884; 29 September 1884. B1/1.
[75] Minutes of Deacons' Meeting, 30 November 1885. B1/1.
[76] Minutes of Deacons' Meeting, 18 June 1886. B1/1.
[77] Minutes of Deacons' Meeting, 6 January 1890. B1/1.
[78] Minutes of Deacons' Meeting, 23 March 1888. B1/1; Minutes of Church Meeting, 30 May 1888. A2/1.

to come who were from outside the Baptist denomination, such as Grattan Guinness whose links were with the Brethren movement.[79] However, Tarn's denominational loyalty was firm. Special collections were taken for Bristol Baptist College and the Pastors' College in 1888, and twelve from St Andrew's Street went in that year to the Baptist Union Assembly. At that Assembly, a new prayer union of Baptist ministers was promoted, led by F. B. Meyer, a prominent speaker at the interdenominational holiness convention held annually in Keswick in the English Lake District. In 1889, Tarn invited Meyer to give a series of mid-week addresses at St Andrew's Street on a typical Keswick topic: 'The cultivation of a devout life.'[80]

The emphasis on inner spirituality — often 'the blessed life' — did not produce an inward-directed church. Reports in the late 1880s and early 1890s talk about bread and coal distributed to the poor; a fund for widows in need; a ladies' visitation committee; and help given during an epidemic in Cambridge. Outreach to young people and children was extensive, with over four hundred children in St Andrew's Street Sunday Schools and fifty in youth and student groups, with a 'Christian Endeavour' which encouraged youth leadership, and a library and swimming club designed for younger people. One hundred and sixty-eight young people were part of the International Bible Reading Association.[81] It was agreed that in 1892, the centenary of the BMS, 'a strong effort' would be made to highlight to everyone, including young people, 'the subject of Foreign Missions'.[82] Very substantial donations, as well as many smaller amounts, were given in 1892 by St Andrew's Street members to the BMS. In the following year, the church commended Kenred Smith, who had been a Sunday School teacher for ten years, to train at Bristol Baptist College and then at medical school. The church recorded, 'We have watched with deep interest and gratitude to God the development of his [Kenred's] spiritual life.' The statement spoke of his 'efforts for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom' and saw him as 'in every way fitted for mission work'. He served with the BMS

[79] Minutes of Deacons' Meeting, 27 November 1888. B1/1.
[80] Minutes of Deacons' Meeting, 30 October 1889. B1/1. For Meyer and Keswick see Ian Randall, *Spirituality and Social Change* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), pp. 81–106.
[81] For example, 'St Andrew's Street Chapel and Mill Road Mission Hall Magazine' (1892). M2/2.
[82] Minutes of Church Meeting, 22 March 1891. A2/1.

in the Congo and married another church member, Maud Smith. She died of fever after only two years in the Congo.[83]

By 1895, Tarn was feeling the strain of leading a large and still growing church. Also, his wife was ill. He was approached by a Baptist church in Yorkshire about whether he would consider a move. He talked to the St Andrew's Street deacons in 1896, who in turn consulted the members.[84] The deacons found 'a small minority of the church and congregation desirous of a change', but 'an overwhelming majority' wanted Tarn to remain.[85] However, on the day the deacons communicated this outcome, Tarn wrote to them to say it seemed to him 'most clearly and unmistakeably the Lord's will' that he accepted a call to Harrogate. He was near to 'nervous collapse' and there was 'the illness of my dear wife'. A move was 'in the order of Divine Providence'; among other things, he would benefit from the north's 'bracing air'. Tarn spoke of experiencing 'unfailing kindness and sympathy and support in joy and sorrow alike' at St Andrew's Street. He signed himself, 'your fellow labourer in the gospel'.[86] The deacons replied to their 'dear pastor and friend'. They, with the whole church, had been 'bound closely' in 'good and blessed work' and would miss his 'kindly guiding hand' and his wife as 'part of the ministry'. In Keswick-like language, they prayed for future 'richness and fulness'.[87]

Charles Joseph, who became minister in 1898, had trained at the Pastors' College, and pastorates in Birmingham and Portsmouth followed. Early in his time in Cambridge, he and the deacons felt St Andrew's Street needed a completely new building. Services moved to the Cambridge Guildhall while this was built. Joseph worked closely with experienced deacons, such as educationalist W. H. F. Johnson, who was the first Nonconformist to be awarded a Bachelor of Arts from Cambridge University, and George Apthorpe, who served as president of the Cambridgeshire Village Preachers' Association. During Joseph's ministry, the question of individual cups rather than a common cup at

[83] Minutes of Church Meeting, 5 April 1893. A2/1.
[84] Minutes of Deacons' Meeting, 17 March 1896. B1/2.
[85] Minutes of Deacons' Meeting, 8 April 1896. B1/2.
[86] Graham Tarn to Deacons, 8 April 1896. Held with Deacons' Minutes. B1/2.
[87] Deacons to Graham Tarn, 9 April 1896. Held with Deacons' Minutes. B1/2.

Communion was discussed. In 1903, Joseph asked members to consider this issue.[88] At a subsequent church meeting, Dr Ingle supported the change 'for hygienic reasons' in the light of 'newly discovered facts in science'. The change, which was taking place in other Baptist churches, was agreed.[89] In January 1904, the new church building was opened. F. B. Meyer preached at the celebratory service, an indication that Joseph had continued the emphases of Tarn on the deeper spiritual life. In 1910, Joseph moved to Plymouth.[90] St Andrew's Street, a major centre of spiritual life and witness, looked for visionary leadership to continue and expand its work in a university setting.

'In a University Town': 1910s–1920s

On 30 October 1912, the deacons reported back to the church on the outcome of a unanimous call the members had given to Melbourn Evans Aubrey (1885–1957), who had studied in Cardiff and Oxford and was Associate Minister of Victoria Road Baptist Church, Leicester. The invitation spoke of Aubrey, then twenty-seven years old, being 'especially fitted to meet the needs of our church, situated as it is in a university town'. There was mention of 'the special gifts with which the Lord has endowed you', and of the fact that 'several honoured and trusted leaders of Nonconformity' believed it was right for Aubrey to come to Cambridge. In reply, Aubrey spoke of he and his wife Edith initially feeling 'very great perplexity' before deciding it was a 'duty to accept the invitation'. He asked for prayer, raising the possibility that he might be suited for 'a more usual type of ministry' rather than Cambridge. The deacons replied immediately to say they prayed that Aubrey's move 'to our university town' might prove to be 'of great advantage to both our church and denomination'.[91] The background was that St Andrew's Street was having little impact in the University. Most Baptist students chose Emmanuel Congregational Church, where

[88] Minutes of Church Meeting, 30 September 1903. A2/2.
[89] Minutes of Church Meeting, 28 October 1903. A2/2.
[90] Byrt, 'The Last Hundred Years', pp. 44–5. In 1914, Joseph became president of the Baptist Union.
[91] The letters are included with Minutes of Church Meeting, 30 October 1912. A2/2. For more see W. M. S. West, 'The Young Mr Aubrey', *Baptist Quarterly*, 33, no. 8 (October 1990), 351–63.

they could hear the powerful ministry of P. T. Forsyth and then W. B. Selbie.[92]

In 1902 a Baptist students' society, the Robert Hall Society, had been set up by T. R. Glover, a fellow of St John's College, Cambridge.[93] Glover, 'one of the most highly educated British Baptist laymen of his generation',[94] was deeply concerned for the future of St Andrew's Street. In a letter to Aubrey on 12 September 1912, Glover referred to the problem of Baptist students not attending St Andrew's Street and described the church as a 'source of leakage and weakness in the Baptist denomination'.[95] Glover became a uniquely influential deacon at St Andrew's Street and a strong supporter of Aubrey. Although Aubrey wanted to make contact with students, and his warm personality, outstanding preaching, and awareness of contemporary issues were to attract many, at the commencement of his ministry Aubrey's priority was to visit all the church members.[96] When war broke out in 1914, many members were dispersed, while on the other hand there were new arrivals in Cambridge, including many soldiers. It was agreed in 1915 to launch a monthly *Church Magazine* for all members and contacts.[97] Five hundred copies of the *Magazine* — later *The Messenger* — were produced. It was announced in the first issue that the church membership had been divided into six districts of Cambridge for pastoral purposes. Members were notified in advance that Aubrey hoped to visit.[98]

The 'Minister's Notes' in copies of the *Magazine* during 1916 reflected Aubrey's concerns. He called for more earnest prayer. 'Let us wait before God', he urged, 'and carry about a more constant sense of

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92 See Ian Randall, 'Emmanuel Congregational Church, Cambridge, 1874–1924: A "Representative Church"?', *The Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, 10, no. 2 (May 2018), 73–93.

93 See Ian Randall, 'Baptist Students in Cambridge: Denominational and Ecumenical Identities, from the 1920s to the 1940s', in *Ecumenism and Independency in World Christianity*, ed. by Alexander Chow and Emma Wild-Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 144–161.

94 Brian Stanley, '"The Old Religion and the New": India and the Making of T.R. Glover's *The Jesus of History*', in *The Gospel in the World*, ed. by David Bebbington (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), pp. 295–312 (p. 296).

95 T. R. Glover to M. E. Aubrey, 12 September 1912, cited in West, 'Young Mr Aubrey', p. 356.

96 Minutes of Deacons' Meeting, 7 March 1913. B1/2.

97 Minutes of Deacons' Meeting, 30 November 1915. B1/3.

98 *Church Magazine*, January 1916. The *Magazine* has no pagination.

the presence of God.' He spoke of the 'shock and horror' in the nation as the war proceeded and asked that he be given news of church contacts serving in the military, those wounded, and any who had died. With conscription introduced in 1916, Aubrey wanted to affirm pacifists who were conscientious objectors to war, as well as supporting the many soldiers who were Christians. The *Magazine* also covered congregational developments. In April 1916, for example, twenty-eight new members were welcomed, most after baptism. Despite the devastation of war, baptismal services were taking place almost every month. The University had very few students during this period, but the church's Young People's Society heard addresses on the lives of St. Francis of Assisi, John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, and General Booth, and a series on 'Women in the Bible' was planned. A Ladies Working Party of thirty-five women was supplying hospital wear for military hospitals. Children's work at St Andrew's Street was continuing, with 180 children.[99] In November a 'Week of Prayer' was held, which was well attended.[100]

Concern for world events continued throughout the war, with prayer meetings focusing on a desire for peace and on the needs of the world. Laurence Ingle, whose family were in St Andrew's Street, joined the church in 1917, at age twenty-five, having completed medical training. Members were supportive of a call he felt to serve in China. A world vision was further stimulated in that year by a visit from W. Y. Fullerton, home secretary of the BMS and also at that time president of the Baptist Union. Throughout 1917 and 1918 Aubrey became more outspoken about the effects of the war. He wrote in January 1917, 'Those who sought war are now weary of it. They know whatever the results they still hope for will not be worth the sacrifices made.' Probably not everyone saw the situation as Aubrey did, but he was determined to give a lead. He described anxiety, sorrow, and loss being felt, and spoke of the importance of avoiding the prevalent spirits of 'militarism' and 'vengeance'. Aubrey was encouraged at the numbers attending services, averaging six hundred in the morning and nine hundred in the evening,

[99] *Church Magazine*, April, June, May, September and December 1916.
[100] Minutes of Deacons' Meeting, 28 November 1916. B1/3.

and the generosity of the members at a time when prices were rising but incomes were not.[101]

Following the end of the war, Aubrey saw that a time of 'binding up' of wounds was needed. He was concerned for physical and emotional wounds. With his typical appreciative approach, he spoke of the 'courage and power' of the deacons and members. Aubrey explained that he had not been able to address all the needs, as he had been in touch with 1600 people and unlike Anglican clergy had no 'staff or curates' to help. In April 1919, at a church meeting, Roger Smart, on behalf of the deacons, proposed that Aubrey have three months of leave. This was agreed.[102] He travelled to the United States of America to meet fellow-Baptists and take part in celebrations of four hundred years since the Mayflower Pilgrims arrived there. Visitors, such as General Secretary of the Baptist Union J. H. Shakespeare, Meyer, and Fullerton, came to preach at St Andrew's Street. In 1919, the year in which the first woman took a seat in the British Parliament, it was agreed that election to the St Andrew's Street diaconate was open to women as well as men.[103] Later Mrs J. B. Bird became the first woman elected. In December 1919, Laurence Ingle spoke at a morning service prior to leaving with BMS for a post at the Tsinanfu School of Medicine, Shantung Christian University, China.[104]

The early 1920s saw sustained growth at St Andrew's Street. The profile of the church within Cambridge University benefited from the appointment in 1920 of Glover as public orator of the University, the first Nonconformist to hold that office. Within Baptist life, St Andrew's Street contributed preachers and teachers who served the villages and supported several missions in Cambridge. Aubrey wrote in the church magazine *The Messenger* (as it was from 1920) of the national 'appetite for amusement' and of the need for 'a sense of the value and joy of service'. He praised the service of Sunday School teachers and encouraged more training for them as educational methods changed. The importance of

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101 *Church Magazine*, January, June and September 1917, and February, March, September and October 1918.
102 Minutes of Church Meeting, 2 April 1919. A2/2.
103 *Church Magazine*, November and December 1918, and February, March, May and June 1919.
104 Minutes of Deacons' Meeting, 9 December 1919. B1/3.

service overseas was highlighted: the church's missionaries were now Jessie Gregg, who was an evangelist with the CIM, Laurence Ingle and Kate Kelsey with the BMS in China, and Herbert Starte with the BMS in the Congo. Alongside its wider ministries, Aubrey recognised the challenge of a large church being 'a real home'. He and his wife opened their home to many students. Over seventy students were in the Robert Hall Society and associate membership of the church was provided for them. More broadly, Aubrey wanted to offer the joy of the Gospel to 'every sort of hard pressed man and woman' in Cambridge.[105] At the end of 1922, he could report on new members, mostly through baptism, taking the membership well over five hundred. The missions from St Andrew's Street had now become separate churches. There were 450 children and young people in St Andrew's Street. Money had been donated by adults and children to Cambridge's Addenbrooke's Hospital. Aubrey spoke of the church's 'life and happiness'.[106]

A major change evident in Aubrey's time was that there were now warm relationships with Anglicans. Charles Raven, the dean of Emmanuel College, preached at St Andrew's Street, and there was an exchange of preachers with Holy Trinity Church. St Andrew's Street supported a week's mission in the Guildhall with Studdert Kennedy, an outstanding Anglican speaker working for the Industrial Christian Fellowship. The accomplished St Andrew's Street choir, with accompanying musicians, occasionally joined with Anglican choirs for concerts. Closer relationships continued with Free Churches (a term replacing Nonconformist) and joint events included Free Church garden parties hosted in the village of Histon by the Chivers family,[107] who were Histon Baptist members. Their large garden had a tennis court where any Free Church rivalries could be played out. Within all of this, Aubrey had a vision for Baptist renewal. He was delighted to be one of seven from Cambridge at a Baptist World Alliance Congress in Stockholm in 1923. He was able to address a youth meeting of three thousand.[108] In the same year, the church was pleased that Glover was

[105] *The Messenger*, April 1920 and February, March, May and June 1921.
[106] *The Messenger*, November 1922 and December 1922.
[107] The Chivers family were well-known jam manufacturers and employed over 2000 people.
[108] *The Messenger*, April 1923, June 1923, February 1924.

elected vice-president (and so incoming president) of the Baptist Union.[109]

Aubrey considered preaching a crucial element, and his sermons in 1923 and 1924 on 'The 10 Commandments' and on 'The Life of our Lord' were seen as outstanding. International visitors to Cambridge, including a significant number of Americans, found their way to St Andrew's Street. Men's meetings attracted two hundred men. Mission weeks were held. Work also continued on the church building. Hearing loops were installed and pronounced very effective, and a large stained-glass window was constructed, remembering those who had died in the war and strikingly portraying scenes from John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* under the headings 'Freedom', 'Truth', and 'Self-Sacrifice'. It conveyed a continuing spiritual message.[110] The church reached 572 members in 1925, at a time when general church-going was declining. An energetic secretary was appointed: Cyril Ridgeon, who had a local builder's business. It came as a blow, therefore, when Aubrey was approached about being nominated as the next secretary of the Baptist Union to succeed J. H. Shakespeare. He was torn, particularly as the deacons and the church expressed their 'very real affection', their 'great gratitude' for his work in 'maintaining and increasing an unbroken unity in a large and vigorous Church', and their appreciation of his ministry among university students and his influence in Cambridge.[111] Ultimately, Aubrey felt he must respond to the denomination's call. At the Baptist Union Annual Assembly on 28 April 1925, Oswin Smith, on behalf of the St Andrew's Street deacons, spoke of the church 'giving to the Denomination' someone known in Cambridge as 'a prophet; a seer; a man of vision'.[112]

Conclusion

The changes in the identity of St Andrew's Street Baptist Church over

[109] Minutes of Deacons' Meeting, 16 May 1923. B1/4.
[110] *The Messenger*, August 21, May 1923, and March 1924.
[111] Minutes of Deacons' Meeting, 21 January 1925. B1/4; Minutes of Church Meeting, 28 January 1925. A2/2; Byrt, 'The Last Hundred Years', pp. 44–45.
[112] *The Messenger*, June 1925.

the course of two hundred years were significant. They indicate the ways in which ministers of the church sought to exercise ministries that were relevant to their contexts. This did not mean that they went along with the prevailing currents. In the case of Robert Robinson, his call for political and religious freedom was a direct challenge to the established order in England. Robert Hall continued this emphasis, but saw the need for the church to be grounded more firmly in spiritual experience. Without that, a church's freedom would lack depth. The ministers who followed in the mid-nineteenth century period, notably Robert Roff and William Robinson, placed great emphasis on evangelism as being intrinsic to the church's identity. All of these elements continued through to the later nineteenth century, but Graham Tarn injected into the church the holiness spirituality of the Keswick holiness movement. M. E. Aubrey, in the final pastorate studied here, was a minister whose preaching and pastoral care had a remarkable impact on Cambridge and on student life in particular. At his farewell in 1925, Robert Hall Society members spoke of what the 'Baptist cause in the University' had achieved during Aubrey's ministry. Aubrey replied that 'support had been mutual'.[113] Throughout the course of two centuries there was mutuality, but it was to a considerable extent through its pastors that St Andrew's Street's spirituality identity was powerfully shaped and re-shaped.

[113] Minutes of a General Meeting of the Robert Hall Society, 11 June 1925. S 2/2.

Book Reviews

Paul S. Fiddes, *Iris Murdoch and The Others: A Writer in Dialogue with Theology* (London: T&T Clark/Bloomsbury, 2022), 220 pages. ISBN: 9780567703347.

Reviewed by Alistair J. Cuthbert

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Iris Murdoch and The Others is the latest monograph of British baptist theologian Paul S. Fiddes. This text is the tenth sole-authored theological book to add to the many edited and multi-authored volumes, and hundreds of academic journal papers, which span Fiddes' active fifty-year career in the academy.

As the title suggests, the overall purpose of this book is to bring the Oxford philosopher Iris Murdoch, who while rejecting a personal faith in God remained interested in the Christian faith, into theological dialogue with other theologians and philosophers in order to demonstrate Fiddes' often-stated belief that literature can *construct* theology in ways outside the traditional boundaries of the theological enterprise.

This book appears to have been circulating in the mind of Fiddes for many decades, since the majority of chapters are revised versions of previously published chapters between 1991 and 2013. Yet, despite the original independence of these chapters, Fiddes has taken them, revised and updated them, and written two original chapters, which collectively give the reader a coherent journey through the philosophy and novels of Murdoch, while examining and assessing her work against the thinking of other philosophers and theologians, many of whom Murdoch read and interacted with herself.

The range of engaged topics demonstrates Fiddes' capabilities as a theological polymath. In chapters one and two Fiddes sets out

Murdoch's vision of 'the good' as ultimate truth; an exploration, claims Fiddes, she embarked upon in reaction to a 'straw God' she believed was the object of all theology. In the revised chapters Fiddes analyses Murdoch's philosophical delineation of the sublime, the beautiful, the conflicted self, and semiotics and language, and then critiques her philosophy through interaction with a wide array of thinkers such as, *inter alia*, orthodox theologian D.B. Hart, poet G.M. Hopkins, and post-structuralist J. Derrida. The final chapter and CODA brings the book to a climactic end with an analysis of the influence on Murdoch of French philosopher and activist Simone Weil and explains the prominence of Weilian themes in Murdoch's work, such as displacement, affliction, and giving attention to the other. Notwithstanding her unwillingness to follow Weil and believe in a personal Christ, it is through Weil that Murdoch arrives at her advocacy of a mystical Christ.

This text is an excellent addition to the corpus of work Fiddes has published on the interrelationship between theology and literature. One of its core strengths is the author's willingness to polemically push back on some of Murdoch's key ideas such as rejecting personal language about God, since it is 'only' metaphorical, while accepting language about 'the good', which she admits is also metaphorical. Concerning weaknesses, Fiddes' kernel underlying presupposition of a panentheistic reality to God, which enables God to speak in different ways through different persons, with or without faith, could be viewed as undermining the revelation and authority of scripture. That said, when the book price is reduced, this book would be worth reading by those interested in the relationship between theology, literature, and philosophy.

Hannah Malcolm (ed.), *Words for a Dying World: Stories of Grief and Courage from the Global World* (London: SCM Press, 2020), 212 pages. ISBN: 9870334059868.

Reviewed by Susan Stevenson

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Hannah Malcolm, Anglican theologian, environmentalist, campaigner, and broadcaster here brings together a diverse group of 35 contributors, from across the global Church, to focus on aspects of the current environmental crisis. Scientists, theologians, poets, and pastors are amongst those who give voice to the climate grief which they and their communities are experiencing.

These short contributions are wide-ranging in scope and are insistent that grief is not an abstraction because people are grieving the death of particular things. They enable us to hear often overlooked voices. Thus, we hear the islanders of the Solomon Islands reeling from the destructive impact of Cyclone Harold and cattle farmers in Northern Namibia struggling to survive in the face of drought. The issues are not solely in the global South because we also hear the voices of communities in the southern Appalachians coming to terms with the havoc of their post-industrial landscape, as well as theological reflection on Western grief at its loss of power.

The wide range of essays explore the inter-relationship between issues of environment, race, and injustice. As well as reflecting on human experiences, these short chapters also examine the impact of climate change upon oceans, reefs, rivers, land, and soil, which helps provide a wide variety of different prisms through which to view lived experience.

A major theme which emerges is the role of lament, which is seen as a way through despair; emphasising that living with grief is a challenging but essential element in finding hope. Furthermore, these contributors argue that shared grief can lead to a rediscovery of our mutual belonging, with one another and the whole creation. 'Our tears are the salty gates for seeing a different reality' (p. 204).

The book is divided into three parts: 'As It Was Then', 'As It Is Now', and the future orientated 'As It Will Be'. As I read the first two parts of the book, I found I needed to remember that future hope in order to cope with the grief which these essays evoked in me. Living with these issues over time does, like the grief process itself, lead to new hope, but it is certainly not a cheap or easy hope.

I began to read this book as COP26 was drawing to a close in Glasgow, and I continued into Advent, reading a contribution each day as part of my daily reading. It leads me to recommend this as a helpful book to use, either personally during Lent or perhaps even better as the basis for a study group.

Discovering that a local environmental group was advertising an online discussion of the book with its author prompts me to think that *Words for a Dying World* could be a valuable resource for drawing people from many backgrounds together into discussion of these vital issues.

This book offers the opportunity to listen to many Christian voices from across the world who have acute theological insight to offer, all delivered in an accessible and relevant way. These essays, many of which contain useful footnotes and suggestions for further reading, provide a rich resource from and for the Church. A tough, but essential read for Christians wishing to offer hope for a dying world.

Brian R. Talbot, *Building on a Common Foundation: The Baptist Union of Scotland, 1869-2019*. Foreword by David W. Bebbington (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 426 pages. ISBN: 9781725298675.

Reviewed by Ian Randall

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It was the previous General Director of the Baptist Union of Scotland, Alan Donaldson, now the General Secretary of the EBF, who invited Brian Talbot to write the 150th anniversary history of the Baptist Union of Scotland (1869–2019). In 2003 Brian had written *Search for a Common Identity: The Origin of the Baptist Union of Scotland,1800–1870*, looking at how the Baptist churches came together to form a Union in 1869. This further volume is marked by Brian's characteristic care in investigating and using sources and telling a story which gives attention to detail and at the same time paints in an illuminating way the bigger picture.

In an interview in *Baptists Together* in May 2021, Brian explained that he had long been interested in how a small network of churches in

the mid-nineteenth century saw significant numerical growth over time and in the twentieth century played a much larger role in Scottish Christian life than might have been expected. It is good to see the way he highlights the role of those involved in local churches, the women and men who were members as well as the ministers.

The 'common foundation' in the title of the book is shown to have had several elements: home mission that had a particular focus on urban evangelism, the strengthening of weaker churches through a common fund, theological education, and sharing of information that offered mutual encouragement. The early growth in the Union is traced: from 51 to 60 churches in three years and by 1879, no less than 80 churches, 29 of them newly planted. In addition to the churches, there were preaching stations and home-based evangelistic meetings — numbering 155 in 1889.

There is analysis here of the encouraging way in which numbers of members and churches in the Union continued to grow up to 1935, their creative efforts having an effect at a time when general churchgoing had begun to decline. However, this book does not simply tell a story of progress. The complex factors at work in very varied local situations are probed. It is helpful to follow the account of the 1960s onwards, when secular influences became more and more dominant, and approaches to mission and ministry needed to change.

This is a fine example of how to write a denominational history. The wider social context is fully taken into account. Relationships with other denominations and other parts of the world are given appropriate coverage. It is striking, for example, the extent to which the Baptist Union of Scotland has had a connection with the EBF. The roles of individuals and churches are vividly portrayed. Perceptive comments are offered.

What Brian Talbot has written has relevance not only to those who live in Scotland, but to all who want to understand more about the way Baptists have been witnesses in local, trans-local, and global contexts. Brian is himself an illustration of these dynamics at work. He is a local church minister, a tutor with a university in South Africa, and a leading figure in the historical dimension of the work of the Baptist

World Alliance. Out of his commitments to the past and in the present, he has produced an impressive book that can provide wisdom for future mission.

Nicola Slee, *Fragments for Fractured Times: What Feminist Practical Theology Brings to the Table* (London: SCM, 2020), 274 pages. ISBN: 9780334059080.

Reviewed by Lina Toth

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Fragments for Fractured Times is a captivating example of recycling — and I mean this in an utterly positive sense. Indeed, the author takes her inspiration from artist Jan Richardson, whose art adorns the cover of *Fragments*: 'in God's economy, nothing is wasted' (https://sanctuaryofwomen.com/WomensChristmasRetreat2020.pdf). Why should good things — such as talks or lecture notes or occasional articles spanning over fifteen years, about half of them previously unpublished — not get a second lease of life? Slee's variety of themes, from reflections on feminist spirituality to the significance of poetry, the spiritual practice of scholarly work, and feminist possibilities of conceiving, imagining, and approaching God, have been reassembled for this volume, and emerge with new emphases and interconnections.

Slee describes herself as a poet and a feminist practical theologian. Both of these aspects of her identity are clearly visible in this book, reflected in the specific contexts which occasioned each piece of this collection — from invited talks to chapters in multi-authored volumes, to poetry written as a response to specific experiences, to preaching occasions. Given the 'fractured times' in which we live, Slee proposes a 'third way' between the insistence on a unified system that has characterised Christendom, and an unequivocal embrace of ever-separated discourses in theology: a feminist practical theology that seeks to reconstruct as well as deconstruct, 'refusing to impose an artificial unity upon the many fractured parts', yet pulling towards 'a larger whole

that might be assembled from the fragments—a whole that is always ahead of us, never fully envisaged or realized' (p. 13).

Readers of this journal might be especially interested in Slee's (previously unpublished) chapters on reading, writing, and research in practical theology as a 'transformative spiritual practice' — a highly recommended read for anyone engaged in theological research. Her insistence on the primacy of our faith journey, through the highs and the lows of our intellectual (and other) endeavours, illustrates the kind of deep awareness and celebration of spiritual underpinnings which permeates the whole collection. Whilst Anglicanism is Slee's theological home, her conversations naturally span the ecumenical spectrum. This is hardly surprising and reflects Slee's own position as Director of Research at The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education. It is also delightful to see IBTS listed alongside other collegial institutions in the acknowledgements.

This is not a polished work, but, as such, it provides a unique opportunity to get a glimpse into the life and thought of a noteworthy contemporary theologian.

Jonas Kurlberg and Peter M. Phillips (eds), *Missio Dei in a Digital Age* (London: SCM Press, 2020), 274 pages. ISBN: 9780334059110.

Reviewed by Peter Stevenson

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In response to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, churches across the world rapidly moved many of their activities online. In some contexts, moving online enabled congregations to connect with new groups of people, beyond the walls of the church.

As obstacles to public worship ease, many fellowships have opted for hybrid models of being church which contain an ongoing online dimension. While this is happening, digital culture continues to undergo rapid changes. Times such as these require robust theological

reflection about the digital world in which we live and move and have our being.

This book provides a very useful contribution to that necessary conversation by exploring aspects of the *missio Dei* in a digital age. Most of the book's chapters originated as contributions to a symposium at the CODEC Research Centre at Durham University in 2019. It is interesting to note that the symposium's convenors Jonas Kurlberg and Pete Phillips, who edited this stimulating collection of papers, are now staff members at Spurgeon's College, where they oversee the *MA in Digital Theology*.

The book benefits from an international panel of contributors from various Christian denominations, and its value arises from the range of topics which they explore. For example, one chapter helpfully views digital culture through the lens of the missiological principle of inculturation. Another essay questions whether search engine algorithms help or hinder people searching for God online. Illustrating that *missio Dei* embraces more than just evangelism, in his contribution Tim Davy examines 'some of the ways in which digital technology is being used to exploit vulnerable children and young people' (p. 223).

This book does not claim to provide all the answers but raises questions which invite us to join in a serious conversation about the Church's mission in this digital age. This conversation is unavoidable because, as Jonas Kurlberg explains, 'digital culture is not "out there" in a foreign land, it is in the midst of us all […] we are already digital natives' (p. 11). This contextual reality forces Christians to ask what it might mean to translate the gospel into this digital culture.

Christians have a track record of using mass media to communicate with large numbers of people. One theme emerging from this collection of essays is that such uni-directional communication does not fit comfortably with the interactive, participatory culture of social media. Recognising the 'interactivity of web 2.0' leads Kurlberg to suggest that the Church needs to be 'attentively listening rather than blasting its message to passive media consumers of a bygone age' (p. 7).

John Drane and Olive Fleming Drane observe that if 'this is God's world then we must be able to find God at work in it', from which it follows that 'there is nowhere that God cannot be found' (p. 152). This leads them to offer some ideas about searching for signs of divine activity within the digital environment. Rather than seeing that environment as a foreign land to be feared, this collection of essays encourages us to engage in the challenging and exciting task of discerning ways in which God is already at work within digital culture so that we can participate in the *missio Dei*.

Steve Aisthorpe, *Rewilding the Church* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2020), 144 pages. ISBN: 9780715209813.

Reviewed by Andrea Klimt

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'It is time to rediscover the adventure of faith', asserts Aisthorpe in his view of the decline of Christianity in Europe. Stating that the Church is domesticated, he asks for 'rewilding the Church'. In a way the book contains impulses for church development, or change management, and an invitation to refresh one's personal spiritual journey.

As a nature-loving person and a mission development worker (Church of Scotland), Aisthorpe reveals himself as an expert, who skilfully combines scientific observations of nature with biblical perspectives. The book is intended for both church leaders and ordinary members. In the centre of his considerations the author places the ecological concept of rewilding, which means that in many places there is a call for more wilderness, as an innovative concept of nature conservation. Instead of cultivating large areas of landscape through human intervention, nature is left to itself. It regenerates itself and, for example, apparently extinct species return. Rewilding is a powerful metaphor and Aisthorpe considers what it can mean and achieve when applied to the Church. Step by step the author convinces the reader — by quoting a variety of scientific studies as well as pointing to historical

events — to observe nature's phenomena and learn to trust in the regenerating power of nature. Rewilding is an innovative perspective on finding new ways to deal with a declining church membership. Rewilding stands for what God is doing in the Church rather than what we are able to do with our plans and programmes. 'Rewilding the Church' is a plea for a radical step to follow Jesus and for letting the Holy Spirit work.

But has the author thought through the consequences of his approach? Does it mean to observe a declining church and only take a step back, trusting that life will bounce back by itself after a while? The author speaks about change and transition and that this is never an easy ride. Reading the book can be challenging as well as inspiring. On the one hand, the idea of 'rewilding the Church' gives hope to discover life where there seems to be none. On the other hand, it challenges the intense efforts being made to help dying churches and communities. Nevertheless, it shows possibilities and gives ideas on how we can deal creatively with this situation.

In summary, this book *Rewilding the Church* represents a valuable change of perspective that can be innovative in individual cases. However, serious consideration must be given as to whether this approach is appropriate for every situation.

Andrey Kravtsev, *Russian Baptist Mission Theology in Historical and Contemporary Perspective* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2019), 336 pages. ISBN: 9781783687473.

Reviewed by Peter Penner

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This monograph is based on a PhD dissertation submitted by Andrey Kravtsev to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois, USA. It is the first study of this kind that tries to identify and describe the mission understanding of Russian Baptists. Two research questions guide

Kravtsev in his research. First, how do some of the most influential Russian Baptist leaders understand the following issues: (a) the nature of the gospel; (b) the Church's identity and purpose; (c) Christian cultural engagement; and (d) holistic mission? The second driving question asks: What missiological revisions, if any, do these leaders deem necessary in the current socio-political and religious contexts of Russia? The study therefore intends to listen to voices on the ground and identify aspects necessary to adjust and deepen mission understanding among Russian Baptist leaders. These include possible inadequacies of traditional formulations; specific areas and issues to reconsider; and potential strategies/obstacles in the process of introducing missiological revisions. The research design implies a hypothesis, which it subsequently proves, that corrections and improvements are needed.

The book comprises four major parts. Firstly, Kravtsev presents the history and present worldwide understanding of mission since the mission conference in Edinburgh in 1910. Secondly, he provides an overview of Russian Baptist developments and influences in history from 1867 (when the first Russian Baptist church was founded in Russia) up to the present. Thirdly, through semi-structured interviews with Russian Baptist leaders, he collects and summarises responses on their understanding of mission. Finally, these findings in discussion with present evangelical understandings of mission (Lausanne is considered normative) help him to analyse Baptist mission thinking and what aspects may need adjustments and widening.

The study offers very helpful and, in some ways, surprising insights. Even for readers who are familiar with the history of the Russian Baptists, it is still good to look at it from a mission perspective. This offers nuances not identified before. The broad evangelical perspective on mission, primarily following Lausanne, is well known and much has been written on this. But it is helpful to look through these lenses at the mission understanding of the Russian Baptists, at their historical mission involvement, and at their present ministries, or partial absence of mission activities. The surprising parts result from the interviews of the thirty leaders who are part of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists. Views on both the historical and

contemporary broader understanding of mission among Baptist leaders of Russia, reflected in their actual practice, unearth some surprises.

Churches in the post-Soviet context of Russia still find themselves in a difficult setting. While some formerly Warsaw Bloc countries can speak of post-communism and evangelical and Protestant communities have the freedom to be involved in the mission of God, Russian evangelicals continue to ask for their rights and need to prove their belonging and relevance as church in the Russian Federation.

The findings on mission that Kravtsev presents might be quite similar in most other countries of the former Soviet Union, and many Baptists and other evangelical groups in Eastern Europe and Central Asia would possibly agree with those results in mission understanding and praxis. Some of them also feel limited in their participation in the mission of God. The current geo-political tensions between Russia and the West present some limits but also opportunities for mission theology and praxis. The monograph is a very good study that is worth attention not only from those in Russian evangelical circles but also from Russian Orthodox and those in the international mission community. For impact in Russia itself it would need to be translated into Russian.

Ksenija Magda, *Blessing the Curse? A Biblical Approach for Restoring Relationships in the Church* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2020), 253 pages. ISBN: 9781783687923.

Reviewed by Fran Porter

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The central thesis of this book is that Christ's redemptive work has overcome the curse (Genesis 3) of damaging hierarchical gender relationships: 'Jesus challenged and reversed hierarchies because he wanted to redefine the world from the perspective of a new creation rather than the curse' (p. 18). Ksenija Magda is a Baptist-by-conviction

woman who loves the Church while recognising its shortcomings, arguing that Baptists 'fail women miserably from a global perspective' (p. 7).

The book begins with a description of the damage of 'curse' for women and girls, men and the earth, before moving to outline how churches embed sinful structures among themselves and in families, and to describe the detrimental social and economic impact of hierarchies. It then delves into the New Testament, and Paul in particular, to show how Christ is the solution to this problem of sin. The book concludes with a consideration of church as a new creation and the possibility of it as a place where hierarchical practices can be challenged and changed. In her argument, Ksenija Magda draws on scripture (with the book usefully having a scripture index) and tradition, historical and contemporary global perspectives and examples, and personal narrative drawn from two decades of international work with women. Indeed, the

> […] female perspective needs to be the starting point for this kind of investigation, since the problem of "the blessed" curse, so to speak, is not evident if we do not recognise the deep, ongoing pain of women and the ripples this pain creates for everyone else (p. 1).

To read this book is to be faced with the subjugation faced by so many women and girls, often said to be in the name of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Blessing the Curse? reflects themes and language typical of evangelicalism (with sin — and women and men as sinners — as a primary analytical category, for example, and God spoken of as 'he' rather than in gender neutral terms) and hence speaks in a medium and from a starting point to which evangelicals can relate (rather than, for example, a discourse of rights or feminist critique). It diverges from much (most?) evangelical culture, however, in that its critique of gender hierarchies is uncompromising: how women are viewed and treated is not peripheral to the gospel but foundational. Ksenija Magda's critique is bold. Her descriptions are stark and incisive. Her narrative is, at times, shocking as she unmasks the patriarchalism still hidden in plain sight in churches.

The book is unlikely to convince those who are invested in hierarchies, because texts (on their own) rarely do; but it will provide illumination, resources, and validation for those for whom gender hierarchies do not make sense, are intuitively discerned as antithetical to the gospel, and/or are known to be damaging, particularly for girls and women. For it is to both the necessity and possibility of working towards restoring gender relationships in the Church that this book bears witness.

C. Douglas Weaver, *Baptists and the Holy Spirit: The Contested History with Holiness-Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 573 pages. ISBN: 9781481310062.

Reviewed by Scott Kohler

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'Have Baptists treated the Holy Spirit like a shy member of the Trinity?' This is the question with which C. Douglas Weaver, Professor of Baptist Studies at Baylor, begins his comprehensive volume. As the subtitle suggests, it is not so much a study of Baptist theologies of the Spirit, but rather an investigation into the ways Baptists have engaged various Spirit-centred movements, especially during the twentieth century.

Baptists and the Holy Spirit unfolds in three parts, each devoted to a particular group. Part I concerns Baptist engagement with the Holiness Movement from the mid-1800s to the early twentieth century, including the Keswick holiness teaching that would exert a longstanding influence among Baptists. Part II plots the connections between Baptists and the first two generations of Pentecostalism, some of whose early leaders had formerly been Baptists. Part III, which takes up about half of the main text, focuses on Baptist responses to the Charismatic movement from the 1960s to the present. Each part includes some exploration of race and/or gender questions, which are by no means tangential to this contested history, as Holy Spirit movements have tended to be more deliberately egalitarian than have some Baptists.

Drawing on an array of denominational periodicals as well as standard theological texts, the first two parts bring to life many significant figures who are now mostly forgotten. The contemporary responses highlight the various issues at stake in these historic, and often cyclical, debates. The third part benefits from a wealth of available material — many figures in Weaver's narrative are still living and active in the conversation.

The book suggests that, with all three of these movements, Baptists were among those drawn to the new teachings and also among those most concerned to oppose them. This is understandable, as Weaver points out in the Introduction, because all of these groups had restorationist perspectives that were in tune with that of Baptists, each claiming 'in some form that they best restored the New Testament church' (xiii). Shared reverence for the Word, desire to follow the Spirit's leading, and hunger for an experiential faith (p. 407) make these groups natural dialogue partners for Baptists, if also natural disputants.

In addition to his basic (and convincing) argument, Weaver's work is a rich compendium of information, and may well be used as a gateway for further research into individual episodes in this history. As the story nears the present day, the narrative becomes harder to tell in a strictly linear way, so that some of the stories overlap or are told piecemeal. One small complaint: some of the chapters begin with what amounts to an abstract of what is to come, while some simply introduce the chapter. More consistency here would have made the book somewhat easier to navigate.

Weaver's book is clearly the fruit of many years' work and will be of value to anyone concerned with the lively question of the place of the Holy Spirit in Baptist life.

John Swinton and Brian Brock (eds), *A Graceful Embrace: Theological Reflections on Adopting Children* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 248 pages. ISBN: 9789004352896.

Reviewed by Arthur Brown

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This book is an important contribution, within the field of ethics and practical theology, on a topic of significance for the Church and wider society. While adoption is a recurring theme within the biblical text, it is an area that has been neglected within the context of theological reflection in contemporary life.

John Swinton (Professor of Practical Theology and Pastoral Care) and Brian Brock (Reader in Moral and Practical Theology) at the University of Aberdeen participated in conversations over five years with practical theologians and Christian ethicists. This volume attempts to distil key theological and ethical ideas from these discussions. The introduction briefly sets the context within the biblical narrative and states the aim of the volume:

> The common contemporary conception of a child as legally adopted into a nuclear family primarily to serve the child's need for belonging and love and the parents' desire for offspring or the experience of childrearing stands at quite a distance from the Greco-Roman world and that of scripture. Any theological account of adoption will need to articulate the relationship between divine action toward humans and human adoptive behaviour toward other humans. And it will do so in the face of the complex dynamics of contemporary understandings of adoption. (p. 10)

The book brings diverse perspectives to the theme of adoption. Many of the contributors bring their personal experience of adoption into their theological reflections, creating a rich tapestry of insights for

the reader. Additional contributors from the majority world would have added to this volume, with most coming from the West.

The text is divided into two sections. The first provides a range of theological perspectives on the practice of Christian adoption. Chapters include 'Belonging: A Theological and Moral Enquiry into Adoption' and 'Entrusted for Creaturely Life within God's Story – The Ethos of Adoption in Theological Perspective'. Section Two moves towards considerations around the practice of adoption and starts with an autobiographical chapter by Swinton entitled, 'Why Would I Look for my Parents? Living Peaceably with the Only Family I Have'. Other chapters include 'Theological Reflection on Inter-country Adoption of Special Needs Children from Mainland China' and a chapter that reflects on homosexuality and adoption, drawing on Queer theology as a framework for reflection on the adoptive family.

Throughout the book is the challenge to reconsider our understanding of family and the nature of the ties that create family in Christian understanding. The parent-child dynamic is repeatedly discussed, focusing on the centrality of calling and vocation. The term 'natural' often used in a discussion on biological-parenting in contrast to adoptive-parenting is brought into question. At the heart of this book is an encouragement to reconsider what we mean by Christian parenting and family.

> Christian parents are natural, not because they are biologically equipped to have children, but because they have a calling to parenthood and a willingness to be faithful to that vocation. Children are best understood as gifts given to us in the Spirit, rather than possessions that are defined by their biological origins. In this way human adoption can be seen to be analogous with the divine adoption that Paul presents to us (Romans 8:15-17). (p. 126)

As an adoptive parent I found this a really helpful, if not challenging, book to engage with. I would encourage students and readers of theology and ethics, as well as those in church leadership, and those who are considering adoption, to read this. The volume brings insights into the many blessings that can come through adoption, as well

as a foundation for understanding of the Body (family) of Christ, the Church.

Paul S. Fiddes, Brian Haymes, and Richard L. Kidd, *Communion, Covenant, and Creativity: an Approach to the Communion of Saints through the Arts* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), 210 pages. ISBN: 9781532668630.

Reviewed by Henrikas Žukauskas

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The book title itself is intriguing. Communion of saints is a topic which leads to ecumenical conversations about the theology of the Church. Covenant, as the authors further explore in this second book they co-author, is what marks a Baptist contribution to the conversation. The first book is *Baptists and the Communion of Saints: a Theology of Covenanted Disciples* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2014). But what about creativity and the arts?

The authors build on a shared journey in experiencing and reflecting on art theologically to make an argument for creativity as a valid member of the trio. Their goal is to be properly (i.e. in a non-dualist way) concerned with human bodies and those of the natural world. Thus, the doctrine of communion of saints would be at the centre of transforming the life and mission of Christian churches, contributing to a distinctively Christian approach to aesthetics and to the understanding of communion to those beyond embracing covenant ecclesiology (Baptists). Such exploration of the commitment of the triune God to the material world would provide a way to integrate the horizontal and vertical aspects of communion.

It helps to know that this book builds on an earlier one. The themes of an ongoing communion of prayer which encompasses alive and dead, and covenant which provides a non-dualist approach to communion, continue in this book. But the focus is on what creativity contributes and so questions pertinent to the communion of saints are posed to different creative arts. The first part, 'The Communion of Saints: Indications', engages the works of writers Thomas Hardy, James

Joyce, and T. S. Eliot; painters Paul Nash and Mark Rothko; and composers John Tavener (together with librettist Gerald McLarnon), Edward Elgar, and Johannes Brahms. The authors take pains to access art on its own terms by means of analysis and biographies, enabled by their philosophical and theological insights.

In 'Indications' one follows Fiddes as the themes of presence and absence, connectedness between past and present emerge through literary works. Then, with Kidd, one sees how through the visual arts one perceives absent presences of the special places, explores the edges of materiality, and ventures into transcendence. With Haymes one wonders how the narrative of a Catholic saint through an opera leads to the reflection on sainthood and suffering in a contemporary world. Fiddes concludes 'Indications' by discussing how music creates a sense of journey and dwelling and gives body to a theological reflection about living after death.

'The Communion of Saints: Reflections' sums up the interaction. The arts insist, firstly, that the world is one and help to resist dualism (Haymes). Secondly, they harness imagination through different forms of 'hiddenness' in fellowship with others and with God (Kidd). Thirdly, they enable exploration of the nature of communion as journey with others to communion with God, how they interweave, how the first is discerned in and developed into the second (Fiddes).

This book is a needed workshop for Christians and churches wishing to engage with arts and to discern theological concepts in human experience. One would wish such engagement to be ongoing. Two questions might further this. Firstly, would the artists themselves agree with approaching their work in terms of tendency towards openness and desire of self-transcendence in the overlap with self-revelation of God? Whilst this book sets these side by side, the Christian concepts provide a critical role in organisation and limits of such engagement. Would not the commitment to embodiment and materiality require that the roles could also be reversed and review and criticise the issues of sainthood and communion, for example? Secondly, are arts really necessary to faith? Do they provide anything which cannot

be accessed elsewhere? This book is an invitation to further tap into the theological potential of this important and interesting topic.

Miranda Klaver, Stefan Paas, and Eveline van Staalduine-Sulman (eds), *Evangelicals and Sources of Authority* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2016), 293 pages. ISBN: 9789086597352.

Reviewed by Pieter G. Kalkman

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This highly relevant book for evangelical and reformed churches today honours its title. The tragic paradox is that those who promote 'Biblical Authority' are traditionally most involved in church-splits, ironically proving that there are other sources influencing what is actually at work as authority. Various examples from daily church life show the reader how the issue of a biased human understanding and conduct regarding authority and its implications is often not well understood. Too easily people assume that biblical authority guides their thought and action. This book shows how *other* factors easily play a significant role in determining their behaviours and convictions.

Fourteen esteemed, experienced, reformed, and evangelical scholars, specialists in their fields, address the subjects. The book commences with six examples of authority-workings in ecclesial practice and these are evaluated. This is followed by four examples of authority-workings in theological debates. The work concludes with three chapters about the functioning of the authority of Scripture with the interdependence advantage of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. This rich variety adds to this publication's usefulness.

Church leaders may value the thirteen essays especially because they deal with matters recognisable as possible issues in their own churches. Tensions with hermeneutics, empowerment, and discernment are addressed; in addition female authority, gender issues, impersonal social media, selective dominant worship themes, the creation debate,

and 'mission' to 'Christians'. Even common but often fallible proof-texting and failing fixed meaning projections in translation are addressed, closing with a view on modern absolutist doctrines while disregarding ancient text genres.

This book has the potential to initiate for 'White-Western Theology' some welcome authority supremacy soul searching, and consequently to lead to some fresh examination of theological emphases. Such may not only benefit world Christianity, but also provide domestically fresh perspectives for the reeling Western protestant church. For example, starting to seek Jesus's communal intent, instead of the American Bible Belt Evangelicalism's John Wayne style and militant individualism (Kobes Du Mez). Bakker focuses on this in 'The Atlantic Citizen' (p. 41), as does Erwich: 'the spiritual I should be embedded in the collective we' (p. 54). Michener's quotation from Levinas, 'There can be no knowledge of God separated from relationship with men' (p. 93/Facebook chapter), points to viewing Genesis 1:27 as God's image in '*hu***man***ity*' (collective), and God's incorporation in 'tov' community (Matthew 18:20; Acts 9:4).

The book illustrates the need for a better understanding of history and the implication of the authority recognition process for the sixteenth-century protestant canon, as well as God's wise intentional choice for notoriously ambiguous Hebrew language. Both Graighton-Marlowe's and Staalduine-Sulman's chapters could find nuanced enlightenment by recognising the need for more careful attention to the Hebrew language's complexity and ambiguity.

Attention to such issues should caution our current theological reasoning style. Such caution could lead to serious consideration of van Kralingen's '*agent*' concept (p. 250), which might better serve as a core scriptural emphasis rather than penal substitution atonement, which Riphagen rightfully recognises as a too limited theme (p. 113). These examples point to necessary emphasis shifts in 'White male theology authority'. The overall impression from the book, highlighted in various chapters and emphasised in the conclusion, is the need for a broader reading of scripture rather than narrow reading or proof texting.